

The Destruction of Novaredok

I

June 22, 1941

In Novagrudok. [In the upper left-hand corner] Until the division of the Polish Territory between Germany and Russia of what was formerly Poland.

This was early on Sunday, 6 o'clock. I left the city to go to work. I worked as a *predsedatel* – that is a representative of a Soviet workers' cooperative. The Soviets were causing a great commotion in the street. Red soldiers are running around with bayonets in their rifles. There were a lot of soldiers in our city. Until 1939, Novagrudok belonged to Poland. After breaking through German-Poland, Russia made a pact with Germany and occupied White Russian Ukraine up to the Bug [River], up to the so-called Kirzan Lines, and none of the Polish population knew about it. I was acquainted with many of the officers in the army. I ask, "What happened?" The answer is "*Plakha*" [bad]. I ask, "What's bad?" An officer whispers a secret to me, "The Germans attacked us last night. They bombed Grodno, Bialystok, Brisk. But we'll show them who they are dealing with." I went to my job, because they would take me right to court if I was 5 minutes late. I could be sentenced to three months in jail. In Soviet Russia, this is called *fragul*. During the day, there began to arrive

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more and more soldiers. The day passed quietly. Military soldiers were walking all over town. The whole city was guarded with artillery against air attacks, because in the city people were already saying that the Germans were dropping parachutists, and the Commandant issued a decree to the civil population that in the event there was an air attack, people should notice whether or not a parachutist was dropped. The military drafting commission immediately began to mobilize the city. Some [people] were supposed to volunteer early on Monday and others on Tuesday. I received a notice for Tuesday at 12. I was already an experienced soldier in

the Polish Army and had served in the Polish-German War in the Brisk D.A.K.¹ and then fell into the hands of the Soviets in Lutsk, Ukraine. Sunday evening the German pilots attacked the barracks. They dropped several bombs and left. Early Monday morning, the city was in a panic. It was already being reported that the Germans are ahead. They had already taken Bialystok, Grodno, Brisk, bombed the Baranovich radio station. The division of municipal soldiers were already feeling

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somewhat nervous. In the afternoon they began to march through the city. Some [?] military divisions were going back to Minsk. Columns of Red Army soldiers on foot, on horseback and in cars were going back to Minsk. The Poles and the White Russians walk around happy. Their savior "Hitler" is coming. Various posters are issued. The Germans are already here, in the city of Baranovitsh. Soon he will be coming to us. The Jews are in a panic of fear. They are running around as if poisoned.² Then the N. K.V.D. issues an order saying that everyone must go to their jobs. Businesses and factories must be open. There must not be a panic. Causing a panic is punishable by death. In the evening, Soviet officials of *the District Committee, the City Council, the Military Committee*, suddenly began to pack their cars, also those of *the Tailors' Factory, the Shoemakers' Factory, the City Supply Office, and the Acquisition Office*.³ There was a great commotion everywhere in the city. People were running around. Everyone's eyes were turned towards Minsk: that is, those Soviet officials of the Red Army and Jews. It was a day of mourning⁴ in the Jewish houses; people are crying, wailing. Our end is coming: Hitler, the murderer, may his name be erased _____.⁵

Children are saying good-bye to their parents.

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People are rushing around in the street Some on foot, some on bicycles. Those who are

Editor's note: bolded sections indicate particularly interesting parts of the text.

Editor's note: several names of towns/places have different spellings – is this a quirk of the author?

¹ Not sure what this stands for. [Trans.]

² "A poisoned rat runs around wildly looking for an antidote" It's a common Yiddish saying. [Trans.]

³ These have been placed in italics to indicate that they are names of places or administrations [Ed.]

⁴ The original says Tisha B'Av. [Trans.]

⁵ Can't make out this word. [Trans.]

fortunate grab onto a car. Fathers of small children, and I among them, also want to escape, but the glances of their silent infants hold them back, and they return to their wives and children. There is a great tumult in the city. The Jewish young people escape in fear. On every street parents are crying loudly as they take leave of their children [saying]: "Perhaps you will be able to survive. Who knows if we will ever see each other again." Tuesday morning I go to the drafting service. I was supposed to go into the Army, but there was no longer anyone there. There was no longer the N.K.V.D. to keep order in the city. An order again went out [sic] to those who were still there to go immediately to their jobs. The stores were once again opened, also the workshops. Everything began to function again as was normal. Several Poles and White Russians who were caught looting were arrested. So it was quiet until noon. At twelve thirty a squadron of German airplanes, over 50, and they began to attack the city with bombs. Thirty-five Jews were killed. People [once again] began trying to get out of the city.

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Jews were running *away* from nearby settlements and villages where Jews lived. I and many other Jews in our town left the settlement of Slukhavitsh. This was three kilometers⁶ from our city. We, the men, left in the evening. We took along a pillow, a blanket for the children and something to eat. Some took grain. There was no longer any bread. We couldn't go back to the city. We sat and waited to see what would happen. While we were waiting, we occupied ourselves with [talking about] politics. People would express their various opinions about the progress of the Russian-German War. We could hear cannons going off in the vicinity of Grodno. No one knew where the front was. Some said Grodno; others Vilna, Baranovitsh. But it was everyone's opinion that if Soviet Russia would last three month and there was no overthrow [of power], the Germans would be defeated.⁷ This what we did, while we sat there for about three weeks, and we didn't know where the Germans were. Some said that Minsk had already been taken by parachutists, [as well as] Babruysk and Barisov, and there was fighting in Berezina. And in our city

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⁶ 1.86 miles. [Ed.]

⁷ The original says "Their heads would be broken." [Trans.]

the N. K V.D. was still In power. By Friday morning the city was completely without any government. The N.K.V.D. had left the city. The Christians were saying with glee that the Germans were already near, and the Jews circulated a rumor that if one didn't return home, then later on the Germans wouldn't allow anyone back into the city. Some people were still afraid to go back to the city, because there might still be bomb strafings, and Red Army divisions were still marching. Nevertheless, some people did go to the city Friday and celebrated the Sabbath [and] spent the night in the city, and it was peaceful until Saturday evening. On Saturday evening a lot of Soviet soldiers and tanks were followed the whole way by German pilots. The tanks stopped in the city and began to shoot at the German airplanes. Over one-hundred airplanes flew over the city and began to pelt the city with bombs. The whole city was enveloped in flames. Several hundred Jews were killed in their homes by the bombs, and the Russians had fled during the night. By Sunday evening there were already German motorcycle patrols in the city, which the Poles,

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White Russians, [and] Tartars met with flowers. A police force was immediately created in the city by the local Poles and Tartars with stripes on their sleeves saying "Security Police." The Jewish population was told to return to the city right away. The Jewish men, with children in their arms, and women with broken hearts began to stream into the city through all the streets. The Jewish center in the city had been completely burned down, and all the houses that had remained had been completely stripped of anything worth taking by the town's Christians and those of neighboring towns. Furniture, clothes, bedding and kitchenware – they stole everything. The returning Jews stuck together. Five or six families went into one house and sat in panicked fear of what would happen the next day. In the morning, the *Security Police* went into the Jewish homes and selected Jewish men and women for a work detail. Their work consisted of cleaning the streets [and] washing German cars. The women's job was to wash the floors. At night the people returned from their work detail completely crestfallen,

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spit upon. Still the same day, several businessmen of the city were called by the *Security Police* and were told that at 9 a.m. the next morning they were to have gathered 300 people and

come with them to the *Gestapo*, but they were to be the best people of the city, the intelligentsia, because the head man of the SS will address them and select twelve men for the Jewish Council. The several businessmen went out into the city, very energetically, to "register" those people. They were successful and registered several hundred men, because some people, being panic stricken, were hiding. However, those several hundred contained the best people of the city: doctors, lawyers, businessmen, merchants, craftsmen – young and old. I was also among them. At 9 am, we were taken to the courtyard of the *Gestapo*. The yards was enclosed with boards and barbed wire. The many SS soldiers came in with

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revolvers and motioned with sticks in their hands. We were immediately arrayed in rows of six across. We were all photographed and left standing there with an SS guard over us. We stood like that until 1 p.m. People began to ask to be able to take care of their "human needs."⁸ They were taken by two SS guards with sticks. They were beaten, called "dirty Jews" and told to go in their pants. This last accompanied by sadistic laughter. There were elderly people among us, who no longer had the strength to stand on their feet. A delegation of three men went out: the lawyer Tsieranovski, the lawyer Gumener, and Mr. Dorbin to ask the headman of the *Gestapo* to permit the elderly people to sit. He said that wasn't permitted, but they could be exchanged for younger people. The delegation agree to that and asked that the elderly be freed and they would bring younger people. That was unacceptable. "When you bring the others, the younger ones, we will release [them]." There were about 60 elderly people among us. The delegation went into the city to get the [required] number of people.

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The city was panic-stricken with fear. That number of Jews were taken there, and no one was seen coming back. All the men were hiding: some in attics, some in cellars, some in gardens. With great effort, and with much pleading, they were able to get the required number of people, and the elderly ones were released. We were held there until the evening. We were photographed in hats, without hats, sitting and standing. Then groups of six men were called into the office to register. In the corridor the six men stood one behind the other in a circle

⁸ My quotation marks since this is a euphemism. [Trans.]

drawn in chalk on the floor near the wall. From standing up a whole day and then waiting in the hall in a row, we were very tired when we went into the office, so unintentionally we would lean on the wall. Then the SS man behind us hit us in the back with his stick so hard that it nearly broke our bones. After being registered, it was already late in the evening, but everyone was once again arrayed, and the SS men on both sides with sticks in their hands – and I in the middle –

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under a hail of blows, we were told to jump over the fence and run away. And we ran, one after the other, beaten up, bloodied, each one wherever his eyes took him. And no one knew what the other was doing. IN the morning of the next day, the city was in shambles. 120 of our group had fallen. As the Christians told us, they were shot to death behind the barracks. These 120 men were the first victims of our city during the first two days. That's when the Jewish Council of twelve men was created. The Jewish Council was in contact with the Gestapo, the SS, and then the Commandant and the "civil" authorities. Decrees were issued saying

- 1) Every Jewish house has to have a star on it
- 2) Jews cannot walk on the sidewalk, but in the gutter, where the water drains out
- 3) Men and women have to get up at 6 in the morning and go to work. They are allowed to go [outside] until 5 in the evening.
- 4) They are not allowed to greet a German nor buy from or sell to a gentile.

Only now did the Jewish hell begin.

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The work began at one end of the barracks. A pole, named Maskalov... he later played an important role in Jewish life _____.⁹ At first he seemed to be a friend of the Jews, but it later came out that he had been paid off by the Nazis. He quickly rose higher and higher until he became the representative of the Nazi SS – a work inspector under the name "Laye." Every day he would take the hundred Jews who could work, and when he said to, they were beaten and pummeled. The rest of the work was done in town – tearing down burnt brick buildings, working in the Gestapo, in the Jewish Council. Working in the Gestapo frightened everyone.

⁹ There's words written in very small letters in-between the lines. [Trans.]

When the Jewish Council called out those who were to work until a rotation was instituted whereby different people would go every day. But one had to go. They said that if one person would be missing, 100 Jews would be shot. Right away there were demands that Jews deliver furniture, bedding, kitchen utensils, watches,

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rings, linens, drapes, things for their wives, plates, flatware, soap, leather for boot soles. This was the job of the Jewish Council in Noveradok every day, and this had to be done to the minute, because every order that the Jewish Council received was timed. In the event that it was not accomplished a certain amount of Jews were shot. An order was an order! Suddenly there appeared a Gestapo [specifically] to see that orders were carried out. Bread – 100 Jews, and the time was given to the Jewish Council. Sometimes we ourselves had to go collecting. Those who went collecting knew very well the consequences [of falling short]. The Jews in the city were petrified. Those in the Jewish Council were running around to all the Jewish house as if poisoned. They beg for mercy, because they have to go to the Gestapo. And everyone who goes to the Gestapo trembles. No one wants to go. They hide. The Germans wait impatiently at the Jewish Council with watches in their hands... Twenty men were brought to the Jewish Council after one hour. In the courtyard of the Jewish Council,

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the people stood in great fear, their teeth chattering from uncontrollable tension not knowing what would happen next. Suddenly [there came] an order from the *Hauptman*¹⁰ of the Gestapo: the Jewish Council must array the people in rows of three. Then everyone was led to the center of town. Our town center was the marketplace. In the marketplace, there was a circle of about 100 shops, and those twenty men were placed in rows of two. The SS came with weapons in their hands and helmets on their heads as if they were going into battle. Guards were posted on all corners of the streets, and then they went to search Jewish homes for more Jews. They gathered seventy-eight Jews, and the Gestapo began to count [them] in ten. Those ten they led a meter away from the row and shot them. This continued for ten men at a time: each one was shot in the face. After every group of ten, this *Hauptman* with a revolver in his

¹⁰ This could be his name or it could be mean 'the headman/the leader.' [Trans.]

hand went to see that all of them were shot. If anyone was alive, he shot him. Fifty-one men were shot, and the rest looked on as if paralyzed. Then

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they were told to go. Of those who were shot, there were three members of the Jewish Council: Moshe Leyzerovski, Ishye Livinyetski, and a man from Warsaw. Leyzerovski's brother-in-law, who had come from Warsaw before the Soviets, Ishye Livinyetski, stood there shouting: "G-d, let me be the last victim of all the Jews." Among those shot was a Navaredker teacher, Solomon. When he saw the shootings, he tried to escape. They chased him and shot him as he was running away. An uncle of mine was also among those shot. Shmuel _____.¹¹ This took place on a Sabbath. The bodies were left lying in the marketplace until evening. Before that the Jewish Council was not permitted to remove the bodies. Only in the evening were they told to remove the bodies under the supervision of the Commandant of the *Security Police*, a White Russian, under [sic] the name Biartshuk, and other policemen. Jewish women were told to come wash the blood off the stones. In between, a German orchestra came to play music in the marketplace. Christians were gathered to listen to the music and enjoyed it. And about the Jews who had been shot, they called out the Germans: "Why so few? The Jews who had been shot, my uncle included, were placed on a wagon and taken to the Jewish cemetery. I saw the whole execution through a window in my house. In a hidden house not so far away.

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There was a severely wounded man. He says: "Jews, I am still alive. Don't bury me alive." The Commandant heard that one frightened Jew was still alive, so he asked the German *Gestapo* what to do: to shoot or to let him live? Because the White Russian police had no rights in the beginning, this *Hauptman* came to the cemetery in a taxi and he himself shot my uncle to death. Everyone was buried in one large mass grave. This is how ended one bloody Sabbath, with a threat to the Jewish Council: "If you will not be exact, we will shoot you all like dogs." But this was no more than a reproach to be more meticulous. After that bloody Sabbath, an even greater fear fell over the Jewish population. Every day at exactly six o'clock everyone got up and ran to work. They still thought it was just a reprimand, because they hadn't gotten

¹¹ Can't make out the name. [Trans.]

the right number of people. But after a few weeks, the SS officers once again grabbed 200 people for a work detail, or so they said at first. They were taken behind the barracks and shot.

The Jewish

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population still didn't want to entertain the thought that [people] were being shot without being told why, for no reason. They were saying that the Germans needed them for work, because these rumors were being spread by the Germans. Only several weeks later news arrived from the area of Vilna that the Lithuanians had carried out massacres of Jews in several towns around Vilna making them Jew-free.¹² But in our city, they still didn't want to believe such things – that Jews were shot for no reason at all. [They preferred to believe] that they had done something wrong in some way. A few weeks later, a military Field Commandant came to us, and people began to say: "Now things will be better. A permanent government will now be installed." There was no talk about a civil authority being established, but what a civil authority was no one knew, but they comforted themselves by thinking that things would be better. People continued to pray for a better tomorrow. In the meantime, the German military did whatever it wanted in the city. They stole everything they could lay their hands on from the Jewish houses, broke windows, beat people in their homes and at work.

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And at home at night, they were also taken outside and beaten and underwent other woes. Suddenly a German appeared as a doctor. In the Jewish houses, where there were young Jewish women, he would examine them, supposedly as a doctor. He would strip them naked, ostensibly as a doctor, and examine them to see if they were sick. He also wanted to rape them, but the men opposed this and the women and children began to scream and run away, so he used to beat and wound the men, break their heads with his sidearm, and then he too would run away, because, officially, he didn't have the right to do this. This was racial shaming.¹³ He rampaged in this way for several weeks until he had raped several women. Where there were many Christian neighbors, they went to the Commandant and complained that a German

¹² The German term for this is 'Judenfrei.' [Ed.]

¹³ In Yiddish it's "rasn shande" which could also be translated as racial prejudice. [Trans.]

impersonating a doctor is supposedly examining and is raping them. They followed up the lead until they found him in the act. What does racial shaming mean? He was sued and brought to court, but they didn't

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allow the [testimony], because they were embarrassed that an Aryan SS man should have anything to do with an unclean Jew. He was called before the Commandant, and it was explained to him that according to their Leader's decree he should be put to death for "shaming his race." Instead they sentenced him to committing suicide, to shoot himself, and they will announce in Germany that he died a hero in the faraway Orient, near Moscow. He did actually commit suicide, and the Jewish population breathed a bit easier. But it didn't last long. A week later, there was a decree that whoever had horses had to bring them to the *Gestapo*. All the Jews who had horses turned them in to the *Gestapo*. And the payment was several Jews had their heads split open and others were crippled and so bloodied that they had to spend months in bed, near death with beaten bodies, broken bones, and blinded eyes. When they had finished with the horses, the Jewish Council received an order to register all the cattle that Jews had. When the registration was completed and the list was turned in to the Commandant's office, it was ordered that every week, Jews had to contribute 50 cattle to the *Gestapo* in Baranovitch. Here thing once again got bad. No one

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wanted to start driving [the cattle], they were afraid that on the way, they'd start shooting, or in Baranovitch itself, no one would even know what happened to them. With great difficulty, the Jewish Council finally got the necessary number of people to drive the cattle. It used to take three days to drive the cattle to Baranovitch. Baranovitch is sixty kilometers¹⁴ from Novogrudok. When the first people returned from Baranovitch, all of them in one piece, only a little beaten up by the SS in the process of turning over the animals, then it became a matter of taking turns. Each time people had to be convinced. Soon it even became a business matter, because when it was the turn of a wealthy man to go, he would try to buy his way out. They would hire people, Jews, for 2000 marks, and then they could stay at home. People would hire

¹⁴ 37.28 miles. [Ed.]

themselves out and get 25 *deca*¹⁵ from the Jewish Council, bread for the day, that is if one work for the *Gestapo*. Otherwise one would be given 12 ½ *deca* bread for a workday, but whoever had money would be able to do this secretly. As the saying goes: the Jew could be *treyf*,¹⁶ but his money is nevertheless kosher. Then it became a competition. People would

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drive [the cattle] for 100 marks and [then] 700 marks, because they were starting to feel [the pinch] of hunger more and more. Suddenly the cattle drivers brought the news... this wasn't until a few months later, when the Germans were already in our town. So that when they brought the cattle through Horaditsh [sic], a Jewish town with a few thousand Jews, that lies between Novoredok [sic] and Baranovitsh, twelve kilometers¹⁷ from Azyere Svitesh, which is familiar through Adak Mishkevitshe's writings... they saw the *Gestapo* drive all the Jews of the town, young and old, big and small, people with infants in their arms, outside the city to a nearby forest. Then they heard a lot of machine-gun fire. When they returned from Baranavitsh [sic] via Haradishtsh, the Jewish houses were empty. Jews were no longer to be seen. The only thing that could be seen were peasants stealing everything the Jews had in their houses. Pillows and featherbeds were strewn all over the streets, and the air was full of down feathers, and peasants with wagons full of Jewish sideboards, armoires, mirrors, beds, [and] clothing: everything from the Jewish houses. They asked a farmer when they were already outside the city where the Jews were, because

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they¹⁸ also went home by foot with "certificates" from the *Gestapo* if they didn't have permission to ride. The farmer answered: "Fabili visyen zhidov" - "All of them were killed. There isn't one Jew left in Haradishtsh. All of them are lying in these woods," and he points two kilometers¹⁹ from Haradishtsh, "in one mass grave." When the animal drivers brought this news to Novoredok, everyone in their houses were in despair: everyone became enveloped in fear.

¹⁵ Ten grams. [Trans.]

¹⁶ Not kosher. [Trans.]

¹⁷ 7.46 miles. [Ed.]

¹⁸ The ones who drove the animals to the Gestapo. [Trans.]

¹⁹ 1.24 miles. [Ed.]

Everyone said, “Well, now it’s coming closer to us. Haradishtsh is only thirty-six kilometers²⁰ away from us. So close!” News came from Lideh that that the Regional Minister had made a *yadzyelnntise*²¹ for Jews: that means on one street he gathered all the Jews, so that they would not be scattered all over the city. News came from Vilna that a “ghetto” had already been made for Jews there. At that same time, a civil authority had been instituted in our city, so people began to say: “Well, now things will be better – a civil government! They will institute civil courts. They will establish order!” And the Gestapo left our city to return to Warsaw, because they had come to us from Warsaw. But now the troubles really began. The civil government consisted of German Nazis, a second round of SS.

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They were called “The Brown Ones.” They were dressed in brown uniforms, in brown shirts with black ties, and on their sleeves were patches with black swastikas. The skull-and-crossbones were on their hats. Once again, a lot of trouble began. We had to make place for them in our houses: furniture, mirrors, tables, chairs, drapes, linens and civilian suits, sugar, whisky, and many others things that the Jewish population in the city no longer had. The Jewish Council was responsible for seeing that this was done. The Jewish Council had to collect money secretly and buy these things from the Christians, so that they could fulfill this request. The Jewish Council thought that if it could fulfill all the requests, it could perhaps protect Novoredok from a massacre. This is what the Jewish Council told the [Jewish] population. The civil authority put its employment system in place in Novoredok, [including] a German work inspector, a Nazi named Schat, a work instructor – a Soviet²² SS man named Roiter, who later conducted the massacres in Novoredok led by the regional Commissar, Taub, a blood-thirsty *Gestapo* man. They took over the work department of the Jewish Council with its list of all the Jews. It was headed by the

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Jewish man, Daniel Astashniski, who later helped conduct the massacres. He would put together the lists for the massacres. In his hands lay the decision of who would live and who

²⁰ 22.36 miles. [Ed.]

²¹ A ghetto. [Trans.]

²² Is this a mistake? [Ed.]

would die. Our Jewish Council was more or less consistent and in order [sic], but the real governor and hero of the unfortunate Jews was this man – [Astashinski](#)²³. This is how our new life began under civil authority as opposed to the *Gestapo*. Two members of the Jewish Council would be in contact with them: Mamik Dobrin and Tsiranovski, the attorney who was the chairman. Both of these men were very honest. Both of these men later died a month later. I don't have any dates. Suddenly visiting members of the Gestapo arrived, and they demanded that the Jewish Council give them men to work. This was a Friday night. All attacks on our city would start on the Sabbath. Go get 150 men! People came from work, exhausted after a hard day's labor and fearful after what they had been through that day, so it was difficult for the Jewish Council to produce the number of men requested. They managed to get 40 men from their reserve list

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held at the Jewish council, because the Jewish Council always kept a few people in reserve in the event that an order suddenly came and workers would be needed. So these forty men were sent. They became upset and started to shout:²⁴ “There are still so many Jews here, and the damned Jewish Council cannot come up with the necessary number.” The Jewish Council felt that something was not right here, and they no longer made the same strong effort to gather the demanded number of men as they used to, and they themselves also hid. I knew nothing and came to the Jewish Council with a friend to see where we would be working the next day. The Commandant²⁵ of the prison came, a certain man named Gansik. He had been a Polish policeman in Novoredok, and he knew everyone. When the Soviets had entered Novoredok in 1939, he ran away to Warsaw. He returned in 1941, when the Germans occupied Novoredok and became the Commandant of the prison. Gansik was the one who demanded the forty Jews in the name of the Germans, because those forty had been imprisoned in his jail, and if more weren't presented, things would be bad. He was told there weren't more men, that people had just returned²⁶

²³ Two different spellings of this name, which is correct? [Ed.]

²⁴ In German. [Trans.]

²⁵ Warden? [Trans.]

²⁶ End of transcription part 1. [Ed.]

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exhausted, and they didn't have the strength to go. So, he began to bargain with a member of the Jewish Council. He wanted them to give him 100-120 men. Even eighty. We could see that something was wrong here. And as we were standing there, someone came running into the Jewish Council shouting: "Jews, why are you standing here. Run away. The *Gestapo* is grabbing people off the street." My friend and I immediately ran away. Even the members of the Jewish Council, and Gansik, furious, left with nothing. In the morning we found out that the *Gestapo* had shot seventy-five people. They had forty men from the Jewish Council, and the rest they grabbed off the street. They drove them into the prison, shot them there and drove off. A short time later, the civil authority issued an order that the Jewish Council must gather together all Jewish items of copper, brass or nickel: candlesticks, _____ and door handles. Jews must give up these things. If any Jew is found to have an item of copper or brass, he will be shot immediately. All Jews gave everything away. They tossed it all into the courtyard of the Jewish Council until there was a whole hill of copper and brass. Elderly housewives wept as they said good-bye to the candlesticks, that they had

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inherited from their mothers and had used for tens of years, and chandeliers. They gave everything away and only said that it was more important to live. The Germans carted everything away. Then a short time later there came another decree: anyone who had anything made of gold and silver and money had to give those up. Everything had to be brought in in two days. The Jewish Council strongly urged that everything be given away, so that, G-d forbid, there not be any complaint, because if they found something by whatever Jewish person it

might be, they would shoot everyone dead. For two whole days, there were people standing in line to give everything away: rings, cigarette cases, money and gold and golden pens. They gathered everything together in several crates. The Jews, especially the young people, said that nothing would help. If there were to be a raid, it wouldn't matter if one gave or didn't give. Nothing would make a difference. In the meantime, Jews from Stolpsti [sic] arrived. A lot of people had been shot in Stolpsti, and the others were placed in a ghetto.... in the sawmill in Svyerzhne. This was after *Sukos*. In our city, there was already talk of a ghetto. This was on the daily agenda of the magistrate and especially the Christian population.

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They just keep thinking about how to rid themselves of the Jews. They spoke about a “ghetto” and [the fact] that there were too many Jews in our city. It's true that they killed so many before their time, about 1,000 Jews, but there were still so many left. The number of Jews at that time was over 10,000. There were many who had escaped from Warsaw and Lodz. Many who been merchants in Baranovitsh and Slonim had come before the Soviets, because when the Germans had occupied Poland and the Soviets western White-Russia and western Ukraine, many Jews crossed the border illegally and settled in our area. They talked until they came to a decision.

It was already winter—June 7th, 1944, the 18th of Kislev¹—a bloody date. It was already very cold: [minus] 25-30 degrees (Celsius)². There was a lot of snow—above one's knees. Before Polish times [sic], we called November Polish Siberia. It was a Friday evening. People were

¹ Is this the correct date? 18th of Kislev 1944 lines up with December 4th, 1944, and it is odd to be describing mid-winter conditions in June. [Ed.]

² -13 to -22 Fahrenheit. [Ed.]

coming back from work frozen, hungry and pummeled. Everyone came to his house. Until that date, people lived all over the city. Jews lived everywhere. When they entered there was a very tense feeling; a shudder of dread, of depression hangs in the air

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Then suddenly the air chokes everyone. People can't breathe. The children sit there chalk white, frozen, because it is very cold inside. There is nothing to use as fuel. We aren't allowed to buy anything from the farmers, no wood. The Germans aren't giving any wood. The only thing we have are the pieces of wood we have picked up from broken down houses on the way back from work: the broken apart fence of a garden. Sometimes, when there was a tree near a house, we quietly sawed off [the branches.] And this was supposed to be called wood for winter. But this too might not have mattered; we would have withstood it, if they only let us sit in our houses in peace and continue to suffer. The women sit with their small children around them, hugging them like little lambs. As soon as the men are seen, [as soon as the children] see their fathers, things are a bit homier, happier in the house. People see them returning from work as usual, and they don't know about anything. The women ask the men: "You didn't hear anything at work?" "No, nothing. What were supposed to hear at work. Who is there to talk to? A Hitlerist? A policeman? The overseer? The Pole who has been bought by the Nazis, and wants

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to outdo even the real Nazis. We don't know anything. We only know that at 6 o'clock, early tomorrow morning, we have to go to work again. It will be the same as it was today and yesterday." The women respond: "If only it would be like that." We ask, "What is it, what happened?" They say that their Christian neighbors told them that day they were digging large

ditches behind the barracks. “Many Christians were hired to dig the ditches, and they say that those are for us. They are getting ready for a great massacre of Jews tomorrow or the day after tomorrow.” Everything before my eyes went black. Yes. The thought runs through my mind: one could believe it of these Nazis. In many cities and villages, there have already been mass slaughters of Jews; *aktsyons*³ as they used to call them. I stop talking when my neighbors, Poles, come into our house. I once lived in a Polish apartment. They came into my house, my former best friends. One of them, Lubyanski, was a Polish officer, a Captain in the Polish Army in the First World War and later, and later became a traitor, the head of the German police. Another one, Marisak, also a Pole, and Fanye Yankelevitch. “As soon as we heard that they were preparing

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an *aktyon* on you Jews tomorrow, [we thought] why would you want the Germans to take all your things? Also give us some of your furniture, things [sic] linen, clothing. Give us. The Germans already steal enough for themselves, so there will be a little less for them. It’s all the same, everything will remain here, so why should it bother you?” I was already angry with Lubyanski from before, but I didn’t show it, because I was afraid of him. Before the Poles, there was a democrat, [Sic] 100%. He was a teacher at a _____ school under the Soviets. He was a Communist. Her enrolled his children in the *Komsomol*.⁴ He was a strict Communist, but when the Germans entered, he found an old birth certificate, his grandmother’s, which said that she was German, and he immediately wrote that he was a Polish German and became an

³ ‘Aktion’ in German, refers to operations involving mass assembly, deportation, and extermination in the Holocaust. [Ed.]

⁴ Kommunisticheskiy Soyuz Molodyozhi (Soviet All-Union Leninist Young Communist League). [Ed.]

officer in the "Security Police" and later the head of the Polish Commissariat, and the former friend of the Jews immediately began to cause problems for the Jews, and he began to avoid me. He didn't know me at all, even though we were once very good friends to each other, going to each other's houses like good neighbors. Things were bad for him before the Soviets came. During those times, I used to help him out with money, wood and even bread. As soon as he had finished talking, I said, "First of all,

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you are not going to become estranged from me. You are already a Hitlerite, so what difference does it make to me if another Hitlerite will take [my things] or you?" I point out. "After my death, it doesn't interest me which one of you will inherit my things, but while I am still alive I am not giving anything away." And they left. I got rid of them. Then a messenger from the Jewish Council came to say that he heard of a decree from the regional commissar, Troyb, that no one should go out into the street in the evening, because he will be shot. No one is to go to work the next day. We are to prepare water to have in the house for two days. I run to the Jewish Council to find out what suddenly happened. What kind of order was this? We had never before had such an order. When I get near the Jewish Council, there are already a lot of Jews there. They are running, trembling, to the Jewish Council. Everyone wants to find out what kind of evil decrees these are. [Do they come from?] the Polish Chairman, Attorney Tsyebanofski? Just one question: what kind of decree is this? He is also upset and knows nothing, but he does say, "Something with this whole story is not right." We, that is the Jewish Council, know nothing other than there is an order that tomorrow morning at 7 o'clock, the

whole Jewish Council must present itself to the Regional Commissar and further orders will follow. This is the order that were have from

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Commissar Troyb. Everyone dispersed, went back to their houses. It is quiet at the Jewish Council. It was usually like a beehive there. The members of the Jewish Council are the last to leave, and we [said] to each other: "Who knows what else this night or tomorrow will yet bring for the Jews?" The Christian population is certain that something is brewing, that something will happen. Not for nothing are they digging ditches behind the barracks, and for whom are they digging if not for us Jews? We had already heard enough about massacres of Jews in other cities and towns, how it happens. The Christian population is already rubbing its hands together [in anticipation] and they'll have good pickings. [They think] "The Jews still have so much that no matter how much the Germans took from them, there will still be plenty for us." Only the city Christians wait impatiently for the moment that they will be able to possess Jewish assets. Quietly they decide who will take whose house. They discuss it among themselves so that one doesn't get in the other's way: there will be enough for everyone. Why not? The Jews don't have enough? There will be enough even for those in the village, because the villagers are none too happy about the [luck of the] city Christians and can't wait, and so they don't miss out and are on equal footing when it comes to thieving they begin to come into the city.

XXIV

The gentiles from the surrounding villages can be seen with sacks and wagons in the Jewish areas ready to steal and pack their sacks and ride off with Jewish possessions. On Friday nights the Jews don't light a fire in their homes. A deathly silence reigns. The mothers, as usual, sit

with their little children around them and quietly swallow their tears. Poor, unfortunate infants. She kisses them. Who knows what will be tomorrow. Suddenly the silence is torn by one gunshot after another. Many shots can be heard in every corner of the city. After every one it seems to me that the house will collapse, and from tension it seems that my heart will stop, and I want something to happen, but also that we don't live to see it, and I pray for death. The Friday night of that Sabbath no one slept. Everyone sat around thinking that any minute they would be taken; now the door is opening and a German, one of Hitler's men, will step in, a weapon in hand and put an end to this fear, to these nerves, to everyone and everything. I sit and think about running, running where? The whole city is surrounded by Police and Germans. The whole time, continuous shooting can be heard without let up. They'll shoot us anyway if we leave the house. The women sit here with small children in their arms. "No," we say, I and one of my brothers-in-law, although the women tell us to escape.

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"Perhaps you will save yourselves and remain alive." "No," we say. "We are staying here. Whatever will be, will be. Let there be an end but [let it come] as quickly as possible. There is no more strength [in me] left to suffer and no more nerve to withstand this. This [was] how the whole of Friday night passed into the Sabbath with cursing the day that we were born. All we have are troubles, and they make us even more hardened. Every once in a while, we look out of the window into the distance to see if it is yet dawn. We can't even go close to the window, because we were told that if they saw anyone by a window, they would shoot into the house. Thank G-d we lived to see the daylight. Early on Saturday, I run out into the street, although it is not yet permitted to go [out]. But I can't stand it anymore. Let whatever will be, be. Let them

shoot me, let them beat me. I think I might hear something, see something or learn something, because I feel that I am going out of my mind after surviving such a night of tension and worrying about various things. Various thoughts run through my mind at the same moment. Here near the houses several Jews are already standing. They are relating what they heard from Christians: that last night a lot of Jews were shot who wanted to escape the city, and their bodies are lying in the streets around the city. By the lock[ed city gate?] lie eight Jews, women and men shot to death. On Pilsudski Street there are corpses: one of them a certain Dinka Mutshnik from Pilsudski Street

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was shot in her yard by her door as soon as she went through the door. German guards are marching through the street with helmets on their heads and guns in their hands like right before a massacre, ready for battle, ready to shoot. They say that the Jewish Council is already at the "Regional Commissar Troyb" [office?]. We wait impatiently for whatever decrees they will bring. At about 9 o'clock in the morning one tells the other that in the streets in the Jewish neighborhoods, a member of the Jewish Council is walking around with a German with a list, and they are calling out who has to go into the "ghetto." Since there is a decree that all Jews must be in the "ghetto" ... and the "ghetto" was being made for us, which was once a secret. Our secret in the city was that in one of the small towns near the city there were six two-story and three-story buildings, and that's where the Jews were driven. The order from the Regional Commissar claims that a ghetto is being created in the south for those able to work, and for those unable to work, and there are several in this category, [there will be] a second ghetto in

the courtyard of the holy sisters. And once a week they will be able to see on another. One is permitted to take into the “ghetto,” only what one can carry on one’s

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back. We begin to pack into [a] sack. The first thing is food: cereal grains, salt and bread, as much as one had. [Also] a pillow, a blanket, linen, and for the children: a shirt, soap. We hurry to pack and to go, because the order states that by 3 o’clock no one can be in the houses. We are packing and gentiles come into the houses. They can hardly wait. At first, they ask that we give them some things. “Go away,” I say. “Let us pack up and leave. You will take everything in any case. If there’s any money lying around here, you’ll take it.” I barely manage to get rid of them with a few rags that I gave them. In the house, everything is already strewn on the floor like after a pogrom. I run to look in on my parents to see what’s going on with them, [to see] if they are already packed to go to the “ghetto.” My father was 62 years old and my mother 55 years old. When I get to the house, they aren’t even packing. They are helping my brother to pack. He lived with them in their house. They want to help him, his wife, and child get to the ghetto. What’s going on. Father, mother, aren’t you going with us? Why aren’t you packing? “No, children,” they say, “we aren’t going. Why should we make fools of ourselves? They will shoot us older people no matter what, so we’ll be in our house. You go. You are still young. Perhaps you’ll remain alive.” I get up and plead

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with them to go, but to no avail. They answer me, “If this is destined by G-d, [we] accept everything with love.” They say good-bye to me and urge me to go more quickly. [They don’t want me to] be late. It is already late. My mother is crying. My father, my brother, my sister-in-

law, their child—everyone is crying! I leave my father's house with a bloodied heart. I go home, and on another street I cry by myself. I see people running quickly through the streets, to the orchard, that is to the ghetto, with little children in their arms and in cradles, with sacks on their backs. It's very cold, a frost, -30 degrees (Celsius)⁵, a lot of snow, a howling wind. My heart is rent looking at those infants. [The Germans] are screaming: "Faster! Even faster! Why aren't you moving? It's already late." I run into the house and throw the sack over my shoulder. My wife takes the child in the carriage, and we leave the house. On the way I stop to see what my brother-in-law is up to, if they are leaving yet. One of my sisters-in-law and her five-month-old child don't want to go. She is sitting and crying: Where should she go? "It's so cold. The child will freeze on the way." She will stay in the house and let them shoot her in the house. Her husband had run off to Russia. I start to convince her that she will cover up the child and no harm will come to it. She barely lets herself be convinced; we swaddle the child and we leave the house with

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great wailing. On the way to the orchard stretches a long line of men with sacks on their backs, women with children in their arms; everyone is going to the "ghetto." Some people I meet are running back to their houses. This one is running back for a forgotten —pot; after all they will need to cook, someone else for a pail. Someone else to say good-bye again to his parents. Who knows if he will ever see them again. We arrive at the orchard. At the entrance there is a German *Gestapo* guard. He lets people into the courtyard when he looks through the list and sees that you are there. I am there, and we are let into the courtyard. In the yard one sees a

⁵ -22 Fahrenheit.

scene that could congeal the blood in one's veins. We are not yet permitted into the houses. We stand in the snow. The snow burns. It is very cold. The children are screaming and wailing, and their mothers cannot help them. The Germans don't let us in to warm up. The Jewish Council manages to get Germans to permit the mothers to suckle their children in a pig sty which stands nearby. There is hay and wood. They keep us there in the yard until late at night. There is crying mixed with hysterical screaming: "Oy, my child is frozen!" The doctors run from one child to another,

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dole out medical advice, because they don't have any medicines. "Don't let your children fall asleep," they shout to the mothers. Because if they fall asleep, they might stay asleep forever. When a child feels cold, it begins to cry, to scream. When parents arrive and once again have to leave their children, he tells them again to protect their children. Others manage to hide themselves in a corner. They thought perhaps they will be saved, even though people don't know which ghetto is better. But the majority of the older people remain in their houses. My father and mother also come again to say good-bye to us. I plead with them to remain with us in the orchard, but they don't want to. We kiss each other, and they tell us that we should stick together, and then they return home. We stood in the yard until late at night. People actually dying from the cold. Some have frozen feet, hands, noses, ears—some mothers breasts. The Jewish Council [tries to] intervene so that we are let into the houses. They aren't permitted to go in. Only late at night did they begin to let people into the houses. There is no room for everyone. We lie in the rooms pressed closely to one another. People are lying on the steps and

under the steps in the corridors. There are people everywhere, but they are content that they have been allowed inside. That was Saturday night.

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No one slept that whole night. They thought that any minute the crazed[?] Hitlerites would break in and put an end to them all. From all over, from all the rooms moaning could be heard. This one's ears had frozen, someone else's foot. A mother's breast. Suddenly a woman's scream could be heard in all the rooms; first one and then another one. I run to see what happened, but it is very difficult to get to the source of the screams, because mothers lost children, sisters lost brothers as they entered the houses, so they are going from room to room searching for them. The corridors are overflowing with people. After great effort I reach the place of the person who is screaming. Before my eyes I see a horrific scene. A woman is lying under the steps in the middle of labor. It's Tsippe, one of Zushe Zusman's daughters. There is no doctor. There are a few women crowded around her. I ask, "Where is there a doctor?" No one knows. I run away to look for a doctor. After great effort, I am successful in finding a real doctor, Dr. Rozenblum. He once was a partisan. I tell him that there is a woman in labor. He goes with me right away to the woman. They take her out from under the steps. A place is made for her

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on the floor, because it's useless to even talk about a bed. Even to get her that place on the floor necessitated my relocating several people to sit on the steps. The doctor busied himself with the woman. He didn't leave her. At 3 o'clock at night [sic], the woman gave birth to a son, and both were feeling well: with no medicine, no medical instruments. Nevertheless, everything went well. It became quiet in our block [of rooms]. In our block, there are a few

thousand people. The lower level is occupied by the Jewish Council and its officers. No one from is permitted outside. The buildings are guarded by police and Germans with machine guns. One is no even permitted outside to relieve oneself, even when one can no longer hold it in. The stench is everywhere. The foul smell is unbearable. One's eyes tear and one's throat itches. It causes one to throw up. If one lives to 7 o'clock in the morning, they begin to let groups of people out into the street to do their business and to get water for drinking. There are hundreds of people standing by the door. Only 20-21 are permitted out at a time. When they return, others are permitted to go out. Suddenly,

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a rumor is heard that the Regional Commissar was calling for the Jewish Council. No one knows what the reason was. All twelve of the Jewish Council members leave under guard to see the Regional Commissar Traub. Various rumors circulate among the [Jewish] population. Some of them say that the *Gestapo* came into the city to perform the massacre, some 500 men. [Others say] that the City Council was called to the house [sic] of the *Gestapo*, so that they could raise 5,000 gold rubles. If they did so then the massacre would be a light one. Some people begin to shout that the Jewish Council does nothing for them. Why are things quiet in Baranavitsk? Because they have a good Jewish Council at their head there, which works with their Polish Chairman Izikson. The Regional Commissar himself shot Izikson when he said that the shouldn't let a single Jew out to be shot in Baranavitsk. Our Jewish Council only makes an effort to protect their own families. The members of the Jewish Council returned at about 1 at night. People swarm to the Jewish Council trying to find out something, but they find out nothing. I am also interested in learning something. I barely get to talk to H[err] Dobrin, I ask him

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tell him the rumors about the money that was requested and ask him what decrees there were. He tells me that what they want is land [?]. If they were asking only for money, they would have managed it. It is true that many *Gestapo* have arrived, and that is not good. He said that they [the Jewish Council] got an order to go, with the police and Germans, to Jewish houses and take all those who are sick to their “ghetto,” to the holy sisters’ nunnery on Kavalske Street. That’s where Ghetto No. 2, for elderly people, was supposed to be. Sunday passes peacefully. People have calmed down a bit. Some people believe that the ghetto will be there, but others say that it can’t be there, because typhus will spread. They are sure of it. Perhaps the Germans want there to be fewer people. This goes on until 6 in the evening. In the evening, the whole Regional Commissar’s Office and the *Gestapo* gathered, all of them drunk. The doors of the blocks are closed, and people are driven back into the blocks from the courtyards. No one is permitted outside. People run back trembling, everyone to his room in his block, and everyone thinks that now it is beginning. First comes the order that everyone must go out to work. In the beginning, everyone is afraid to go. Then the Jewish Council goes round and tells everyone that they should

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go out to work. Men begin to say good-bye to their wives and children; children to their parents, those who have smuggled their parents in. A quiet sobbing is heard, which makes one’s blood congeal in one’s veins. The Jewish Council runs around shouting, “Quicker. They will soon lock the doors, and no one will be allowed out.” Everyone starts running. People rush

to get out as fast as possible, because standing near the door there are Germans with knouts⁶ in their hands, which they crack over our backs, over our heads. Everyone wants to run through quickly. I am already in the yard. The Jewish Council places us in rows of four, and they take us to work. On the sides there are Germans carrying machine guns ready to shoot anyone. They take us to the cattle market. Opposite the orchard there is large market fenced in with boards frozen deep into the snow. We saw it to pieces. We are divided into groups of four or five. We are to dig out these pieces of fencing, put them on our backs and carry them, while being beaten by German knouts. We tear out the frozen pieces and put them on our backs. When everyone has [something] on his back and we are standing in rows, one behind the other, we hear the order: "Forward! Forward!" All around us there are Germans with machine guns in their hands and dogs by their sides,

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and we are told to walk four kilometers⁷. We rest one time along the way. We carry the pieces of fencing. We feel like our feet might break under us; any minute our necks will break. It is very, very difficult, but with our last ounce of strength we bear it. A stronger person helps a weaker one, and in this way we carried [the boards]. At midnight we were done carrying [our burden]. We are taken back to the orchard. We approach the orchard from afar, and we see that the orchard is lit up, not in the normal way, and there is a lot of movement in the courtyard. We get closer with hearts beating [wildly]. Not one of us can say a word. We walk as

⁶ A heavy whip of multiple rawhide thongs attached to a handle – sometimes including metal wire or barbed hooks. Commonly used for corporal punishment in Imperial Russia. Derived from the Russian word 'khyt' which translates as 'whip.' [Ed.]

⁷ 2.48 miles. [Ed.]

if mute. The yard is surrounded by *Gestapo* and Hitlerite youths, SS. We are taken to the courtyard, but we are not permitted into our block. From the other blocks, they call us to come to them. The blocks are surrounded by military *Gestapo*, and we are commanded not to talk to each other and not look around. Anyone who doesn't obey will be immediately shot on the spot. [sic] We stand around as if mute. Before our eyes we see a scene that, as I recall it now writing these lines, makes my hands tremble and the hair on my head stand on one end. On one side of the courtyard stand 400 or 500

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people: men, women, children and the elderly, guarded by SS. People are continuously being brought down the stairs and placed with the others. People are crying and shouting: "Where are you driving us? To be shot?" One man yells, "I am a tailor." Others yell: "I am a shoemaker." "I am a seamstress. I can still work." "Yes," they respond. "There we need people like you. We are sending you to work." And people are still being taken out of the blocks. One man, Ile Bisler, was stubborn and refused to go, so they shot him dead right on the steps. We wanted to sneak the Dvoretser Cantor, as he was called in Novorebik, Ruben Narver, into our group, but he was caught, taken out and shot. This selection [process] in our block went on until 1 o'clock at night [sic]. When they finished with our block, they let us go back inside. As we were walking up the steps to our rooms, we [heard] more screaming coming from the courtyard: "I am still young; I can still work; I still want to live!" We hear cars arrive and take people away. We go into our rooms and cry. One person lost his father another his mother. Someone lost his children, someone else is missing a sister, a brother. Others are missing their wives or husbands. Everyone cries and wails. They had already cleaned, made enough place. The young

mother who had just given birth and her child are no longer with us. They have been taken away. There still remains

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on the floor, there where she lay, the sign of blood from the birth. A German comes in and tells us to turn off the light and to keep quiet, and if we don't, they'll shoot inside through the window. We turn off the electricity and lay down on the floor, deeply wounded, and everyone sobs to himself. We lived to see daylight. In the morning, the entrance is a bit freer. People come running over from the other blocks to find out who is missing, who was taken away.

There is more crying. Policemen are walking around in the courtyard. If they find someone wearing a good pair of boots, they take them off his feet by force; the same if they find a good pair of galoshes or a suit, and in addition they beat the person up and yell at him: "You scurvy Jew, you'll all be shot anyway, so what do you need it for?" This goes on until about 9 o'clock in the morning. Suddenly more *Gestapo* arrive. Everyone is forced back into the blocks. The doors are locked. A German stands at every door and doesn't let anyone in or out. We stand at the windows and look out at the courtyard to see what's happening. A lot of cars have gathered in the courtyard. We see that they are leading everyone out of the other buildings [blocks] into the courtyard and they are led right to the cars.

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People scream: "Help! Save us! We want to live. We are young. We will work and live." [sic]

People don't want to get into the cars. They are beaten severely with whips, with rifles, with the butt end of guns. There are already people lying on the ground with their [heads] split.

People who have been shot are also lying there. We see that the massacre has already begun.

Many Jews who were standing there hung themselves right there with the belts from their pants, so long as they didn't have to get into the cars and ride to the ditches. People who had poison took it. The people were taken in the cars, and as they were being driven out they shout to us: "Jews, you have remained alive. Don't forget us. Tell the world about the murders committed by the Germans. Take revenge." Shooting can be heard from the side streets. People being driven [by the Germans] jump out of the cars, trying to escape. They are shot and killed. Everyone is led to the ditches behind the barracks. This is how things went on until 3 in the afternoon. At 3 in the afternoon the *Gestapo* comes to us again and we are once again driven to the same job of carrying pieces of fence to Peresyke. We carry the fencing. Jewish corpses are strewn in the streets. All of the snow is covered with spilled Jewish blood. We pass by the holy sisters. There too, shot to death, Jewish bodies lie in the courtyard. No one is there. Now it's as quiet

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as if no one had been there. Only the dead Jewish bodies and their spilled Jewish blood on the snow bear witness. Phylacteries, religious books, torn Torah scrolls lie abandoned on the streets. These are things that the Jews took with them believing the Germans that a ghetto would be made. All of this we see as we walk by carrying the fences to Peresyke. There, in Peresyke, we were told would be our ghetto. "That's where you will live, and you will go to work." On that day, more than 4,000 Jews were shot in Shelib, 12 km.⁸ from Novoredok; 500 Jewish families lived there. All of them were brought to Novoredok by car and shot. The residents were brought from the villages to Novoredok by car and shot. Everyone [was buried]

⁸ 7.45 miles.

in one mass grave. One Jewish miller, Shiruk-Izik Kagon lived in Slabodke, 5 kilometers⁹ from Novoredok. He supplied practically all of Novoredok with bread and flour. At the time when we were still living in the city, people would go out to his mill with sacks, because he still lived at the mill. Until the last day, he would fill everyone's sack with flour. "Take as much as you can carry," he would tell everyone. He was a very honest person, has a good relationship with the Christians also. When the *Gestapo* came to take him and his family away, the whole village of Christians stood up for him. "We will not

⁹ 3.11 miles.

let you take him. He is a very honest Jew. He has always lived together with us, and may he continue to be with us.” So the Germans left, but they returned late at night especially for that family and brought them to Novaredok, shot them dead and threw them into the same mass grave. When a certain Abrashe Vaysman from Lodz, who lived in our city, was standing by the ditch waiting to be shot, pulled out a razor and slit a German’s throat. They didn’t shoot him, but tortured him to death. After that case, they asked the people to undress and walk naked to the ditches. There was a kind of board across the ditches. They used to drive the people onto the board and shoot them. This is how the first massacre ended in Novaredok—with 4,000 victims. In this massacre, I lost my parents and also a Christian, who took it upon himself to hide them during the massacre. A[nother] Christian, Kola Kolola, brought them to the Germans himself to be taken away and shot.

This is how the first operation/raid against the Jews in Novaredok ended—with 4,000 victims. A certain Malka Djintsalska-Dzhilevitsh, or as people used to call her, Malta “the toy” was giving birth at home. The SS took her to the hospital. After she delivered the child, they shot her and the baby in the hospital along with all the Jewish patients who were there. A ten-year-old child named Shviranski, from Baranovitsh who was also in the hospital was shot in his bed.

We were only kept in the orchard for three days after the massacre, and every day we were taken to build the ghetto in Feresike. The ghetto was not yet finished after three days, so we were taken in groups from the orchard to the “ghetto.” [sic] The houses in the Ghetto were numbered, and how many people were supposed to go into each house had been figured out in advance. A room

which was 5 meters by 7 meters¹ was supposed to hold 37 people. Wooden plank beds for sleeping were built one on top of the other. In the morning, everyone 10 years and older, had to go to work until nighttime, and sometimes it turned out that they had to work at night also. The [members of] the Jewish Council and their families all survived the massacre, so the whole Jewish Council came to the ghetto. The Jewish Council was accompanied by 30 policemen and the Chief of Police, a certain Balinski, a pilot from around Warsaw, quite an intelligent person. Everything was in order with him. There were various types among the policemen. There were those who carried small whips and, from time to time, liked to let themselves use them arbitrarily across someone's back. Their task was to drive everyone to work, preserve cleanliness and order in the ghetto, to stand by the gate to see who was carrying what into the ghetto, to let people

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out through the gate and in. A kitchen was made in the ghetto, and people used to cook. After work we were given a bowl of soup. It was called soup, but in truth it was water. One had to search for a granule of grain. [We were also given] 12 1/2 *deka*² bread a day. This became the routine of life in the ghetto. There were also doctors and a hospital in the ghetto. The first weeks passed more or less quietly, but then troubles began again. Suddenly there was a raid in the ghetto to find whatever someone possessed. Gendarmes were brought in as well as "civilian" forces, the brown ones. And they looked through all the poor things that were there. They confiscated linens, and suits that might have been brought along to the ghetto in to trade with a gentile for bread or potatoes. [They took] pillows and blankets while shouting, "Jews don't need this. Jews can also sleep on boards." They took flour and the bit of grain that someone might have had. Later there was a decree that Jews who had pelts, fur must give them up to the Jewish

¹ Roughly 16.5 x 23 feet [Ed.]

² Not sure what this means – could refer to the metric "deka" which is 10¹ or roughly 120 grams of bread.

Council, and the Jewish Council must bring it to the SS, [and?] the civilian forces within 2 days. If someone were found with these items after that date [they]³ will be shot. Everyone gave everything away. People remained bare, naked. It was a harsh winter with a lot of snow and great frosts, but the houses were warmed by body heat. Heat was not necessary. Suddenly the building Commissar, Traub, may his name be erased from memory,

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issued a decree to the Jewish Council, when the water [pipes] froze, that 20 people must repair this. The ground was frozen and one could not dig right away, so one had to make little fires to warm the ground, and this all took time, but he wanted it finished right away, and he took his anger out on the workers. The workers were imprisoned and beaten bloody. Afterwards the workers lay in bed, their bodies swollen, and people were afraid to go to work. So Herr Dobrin and Chairman, the attorney [?] Tseranovski, the representative of the Jewish Council, went to the Regional Commissar and explained to him that the ground is frozen and the workers are not to blame. The ground must first warm up and then they could break up the ground and find where the pipes are frozen and repair them. Then he ordered them to work all night without a break, until it would be finished. So the work continued all day and all night. The workers took turns working by day and by night, 12 hours at a time. They would have to stand and work the whole 12 hours, because if he caught someone straightening out his back, not even resting, he would immediately receive 25 lashes of the whip. One evening, when the night shift was working,

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the civil authorities had a birthday party at the house of the Regional Commander Traub. Late at night, when everyone was already drunk, and the unfortunate Jews were standing and working,

³ Added "they" [Ed.]

they moved the fire further and further away to dig in the warmed ground. The Regional Commander was drunk and wanted to amuse himself, so he took his revolver and began to aim it at the unfortunate Jewish workers and shoot. He shot three Jews, and the rest ran away. Three Jewish victims lay by the fire. The Regional Commander himself went out and threw the unfortunate victims into the fire to burn. One of them, Kushner, a 15 year old boy, whose father was still alive, was not yet quite dead. He was wounded but remained silent. Only when the Regional Commander left did he get up on all fours and crawled out of the fire with a burned foot and hid himself in a wood shed. In the morning, the Jewish Council was told to go get the burned victims. the Jewish Council brought them to the ghetto. The burned boy was taken to the hospital. He remained alive but died in the second massacre. The victims were buried

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in the Jewish cemetery accompanied by much crying. And there was mumbling, which did not bode well for us, that there was something brewing against us. Things went on in this way until after Passover: every day they worked, every day they were whipped, and there were deaths. After Passover, we, the young people, began to talk about escaping from the ghetto, because we saw that here everyone was going to be killed. However, there was nowhere to run to. After Shavuos, we heard about partisans. There was a time when the Regional Commissar's representative, his staff, and several hundred Germans, after a massacre in Ivinitz on the Jews close to the Soviet Army with a division of military partisans who were still behind the front organized in groups [?] after a battle in which many Germans were killed and the partisans took one alive. The lieutenant tied him to his horse and led him through the villages around Pishtshe to show all the gentiles and [then] killed him. At that time a massacre took place in Lyubtsh, Carelitsh, Nalibak, Zhetl and the small town of Navoyelne near Novorodok. All the Jews were

shot. In Lideh, where they always said there wouldn't be a massacre, there was a [great] slaughter—4,000 Jews were shot. In all of the

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above mentioned cities and towns, ghettos had been made. A short time afterwards, a decree was received that those Jews who had remained alive from Lyubtsh, Carelitsh, Nalibak, Ivinitz, [and] Rubyezevitsh must be taken to Novorodok. In Novorodok, the main ghetto for Jews was built. No Jews were allowed in the whole area around Novorodok. The Novorodok Ghetto was being prepared to receive the Jews who were supposed to arrive from the surrounding towns. The Jewish Council [and?] the police go from house to house counting the people. They measure the rooms and write down where they might be able to fit in a few more people, where they could build additional plank beds, three of them, one on top of the other, and even four high. But all of this wasn't sufficient. They went into attics and ordered barns to be cleaned out. They got everything ready. One day, the first transport arrived; Jews from Carelitsh accompanied by Security Police and Germans. They arrived in the evening with their bundles on their backs and small children in their arms. Carelitsh is 21 kilometers⁴ from Novorodok. They had walked the whole way without anything to eat or drink. All they had were German clubs [?] over their heads and several Jews shot along the way.

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They dragged themselves along and barely made it alive, weary [?] from the road. Before leaving Carelitsh, they were given one hour to get themselves ready and to be at the [appointed] place in the ghetto. And after that if anyone was caught somewhere in a house, he was shot right there on the spot. Everyone followed the order, and in the course of one hour, they abandoned their house.

⁴ 13.04 miles [Ed.]

The Jewish Council and our ghetto police immediately began to organize the people, because in the morning they all had to go to work. They were all capable of working. That was why they were permitted to live. In the morning the Lubtsher Transport of Jews arrived. Lubtsh was also 21 kilometers from Novogradok, but it was worse for the Jews of Ivinets and Rubizhenits.

Ivinets is 75 kilometers from Novogradok, and Rubizhenits is even further. The Jews of Rubizhenits and their children were brought to the Ivinets Ghetto, and the Head of the Gestapo explained to them that since Ivinets was far from Novogradok and no train runs there, they had to walk. Since that would be difficult for them with their

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children, the children, the elderly and the frail would remain there in the barracks, and when they arrived in the Novogradok Ghetto they would find their children there, since they would be driven there in cars. In that way, they would arrive even before [their parents] did. Parents were forced to leave their little children in the barracks. They left their homes with broken, bloodied hearts but with the hope that as soon as they arrived in the Novogradok Ghetto, they would meet their children again. At the appointed time, they were on their way. It took three days. Eight men were shot along the way, because they had become weakened and has no more strength to continue. As soon as the women stepped through the gate of the Ghetto, they immediately began to shout, "Take us to our children." We were all astonished: "Why were they talking about children?" But a thought immediately occurred to me that the Germans had probably carried out one of their sadistic ranks⁵ on these unfortunate people.

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⁵ What does this mean? [Ed.]

Suddenly a scream could be heard, a woman's voice: "Quickly, save her. A doctor!" I look around and see three mothers take their infants out of their knapsacks. They hadn't trusted the S.S. Gestapo. Instead, of putting food and underwear in their knapsacks, they packed in their little children. Only one child, of one mother, suffocated. The Jewish Council and the Ghetto police, wanted to settle the Jews [into the ghetto], but no one was moving. They were standing in one spot, crying and screaming: "Give us our children!" These heartrending scenes went on until late at night. Women cried, went into spasms, but how could we comfort them? It was clear to all of us that the German murderers had killed all the children, and either today or tomorrow, the same fate awaited us. These people were housed in the attics and told to clean the barns. Some of them remained in the street, because there was no more room, not in the attics and not in the barns.

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The panic in the ghetto was even greater. They understood that people couldn't live like this, and the Germans would not permit it. Various sickness began to spread in the ghetto: typhus and tuberculosis. People could feel that a massacre was imminent. The young people began quietly to organize: "Enough! We must escape from here, not go like sheep to the slaughter."⁶ News began to arrive from partisans in the forest and from the area around Novoroduk. In the woods, a certain [man named] Grismov was the leader [of some men]. He was a Russian officer who remained with some men from the Red Army, [but]⁷ who could not cross the front to get to the Russian Army. He threw fear into the Germans in Novorodok, Lida [and] Baranovitsh. In one day he destroyed seven cars of Germans, near "Svitezsh." This gave us more courage. In our organizing talks, everyone would now say, "Well, now we can start to leave the ghetto." Of

⁶ This could potentially be a reference to Abba Kovner's resistance rhetoric [Ed.]

⁷ Added "but" [Ed.]

course, the Jewish Council and the ghetto police immediately began their harassment. More than once, we were called to the police station and were threatened with good and with bad. “If you leave,

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you will bring trouble to all of us in the ghetto, because the Gestapo know exactly the number of Jews in the ghetto, and if they find out someone went off to the woods, they’ll kill everyone in the ghetto.” “Jews,” we would try to explain, “don’t be blinded. One way or another, they will kill all the Jews anyway.” At that time, there was a Jew from our area, an informant of the Security Police, a German, a drunk. He would take everything he heard and saw in the ghetto to the police. Then he was shot in the woods in Bielski’s contingent. He had been wounded in a massacre. We had already been in the woods a long time. There had been an organized slaughter of Jews in Novorodok. He was of no further use to the Germans, so they also took him to be shot, but he succeeded in escaping and coming to us, where his wounds were healed. We wrote a protocol with signatures and shot him as an informer⁸ [?]. We didn’t stop at any threats and terror from the ghetto. More than once the ghetto police, arrested one of our group,

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Threw him into a wet cellar, beat him, starved him, kept him for eight or ten days, raided us, took one of our rifles, but we pressed on with our work and sent a group out to the woods in the Nalibaker forest. This was in 1942. We united the Novorikokers with the Ivinitser youth. It Ivinitzers were the guides, because they knew how to get to that forest. They knew all the roads. At that time we didn’t talk about party allegiances. Everyone was united in on party. Zionists, Bundists, Communists...everyone was united in trying to save themselves from the ghetto, from

⁸ Would “collaborator” work? [Ed.]

the murderers. Thirty-six men were the first explorers from our ghetto. We had agreed that if they were successful in getting there in peace and making contact with partisans and returning to the ghetto and taking out more people, then we would take more and more people. In this way, we would take more young people out of the ghetto. But unfortunately, our first expedition was not successful. All of them arrived in the forest, but joined a Christian group, and all of them died in an attack on the town of Nalibuk.⁹ Once again those who remained in the ghetto grieved

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and said to us: “You see, we told you that there is no place for us to be. We have to sit quietly, silently in the ghetto. Follow the Germans’ orders and we’ll survive.” This is what the member of the Jewish Council, Shmidov, said while leaving his wife and children just to convince us. But we did not cease our efforts. Every day, while at work, we would gather information about the partisans from Christians we knew and bring it back to the ghetto, telling it all at our secret gatherings. At the same time, the Gestapo continued its work of extermination. News came from Slonim that everyone in the ghetto had been killed. They had burned everyone alive. Grenades had been thrown into every house, which had then been doused with gasoline. Then they lit a match and the whole ghetto went up in flames, so that people who had been taking refuge in a hiding place would be suffocated. Everyone from the Slonim Ghetto [was] killed. No one survived. Our Jewish Council defended themselves saying

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that the Jews of Slonim were certainly at fault. They had probably done something, and because of that they had been killed. A little later the Regional Commissar, Traub, may his name be

⁹ It is possible they were murdered by their Christian “comrades” due to antisemitic animosity [Ed.]

erased, called the whole Jewish Council to his office. Only 11 men went. Munye Dzhentsikalski was sick, so he stayed home. As it happened, we were just coming back from work at that time. It was in the evening, and it was raining. We were just led back from work, and the Jewish Council went, sadly, to [see] the Regional Commissar, because everyone knew that when Traub calls, nothing good would result. I asked one member of the Jewish Council, Mordkhe Nyonkovski, where they were going. He responded, “When we are called, we go! But I don’t know why, but most likely no good will come of it.” I never saw him again. When we got to the ghetto, a taxi with SS had arrived to get the 12th member of the Jewish Council. He was very sick, so he was carried to the taxi, placed inside and taken away. Various rumors were being spread in the ghetto. Some said that

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the Jewish Council was being given important instructions, and that was why everyone had to be there. That was the reason they came to get Munye Dzhentsikalski; some said that they were preparing another massacre. It was late at night, and the Jewish Council had not yet returned. This already made everyone suspicious. The whole night passed and the Jewish Council hadn’t returned. In the morning we found out that the Jewish Council was in jail. One of its members, Yakov Abavitsh, was accused of bringing an animal into the ghetto and slaughtering it. And if he had done this, then the whole Jewish Council was guilty. The Jewish Council was kept in jail for two days, and at dawn on the third day, the Jewish Council was taken behind the barracks [and] shot. The ghetto was once again thrown into a panic. [People were saying] “Now, they’ll certainly shoot everyone in the ghetto. If they shot the Jewish Council, why wouldn’t they shoot us also?” Everyone was living in horrible dread: “They’ll be killing the

whole ghetto very soon.” In the meantime, the Jewish police is maintaining order in the ghetto. They now have all the power. In the evening,

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the managers of the massacre arrived in the ghetto with gendarmes and issue an order that the Jewish police announce to those living in the ghetto that the Jewish Council had been shot, because of their bad behavior: they permitted the residents of the ghetto to carry clothing out of the ghetto when they were going to work and selling it to the Christians. They smuggled food into the ghetto, and other such things. Nothing will happen to those living in the ghetto. They should remain calm, and by tomorrow morning a new Jewish Council must be created, headed by Khaim Izikovitsh. The head of the police will be Max Ratshkovski. Our activities did not cease but spread even wider. Another group went out to the forest. This time 8 people, led by Moyshe Vishnyevski. He had been born in a village and had lived the whole time in the village. He came to the ghetto, when everyone in the villages had been killed. On the way, they got lost and they were on the bridge in Shtshors, which is over the Nyeman [River]. In

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Shtshors there was a large _____ of White Russian, Lithuanian and German police. On the bridge, there was a large guard. Vishnyevski survived and all were shot. He came back to the ghetto with the sad news. During this time a rumor spread around the ghetto, that a massacre was imminent, that Daniel Astashinski and Moyshe Burshteyn, who were the leaders and liaisons to the German Work Office in the Regional Commission, were preparing a list of those who should remain alive and those who would be killed. Their Work Office was located in the German Regional Commission’s office, No one could get there, because Jews weren’t allowed to go into the city, except to go to work when they were led there. So at night, when they came to the

ghetto, their houses were besieged by hundreds of people with questions: “Daniel, on which list am I?” Everyone had the same question. Daniel used to send them to Moyshe and Moyshe to Daniel, and no got an answer. At this time, we became connected to a Christian, one Kazlovsky, from Makrets.

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10 kilometers¹⁰ from Novogrodok. He used to bring saccharin, tobacco shag, stones [?] for machines. He also told us that in the woods near his village the Bielski family was hiding and that they came to him every night. [He asked us] why we weren’t going into the woods. A cousin of his, Yudl Bielski worked with me, and all of us together organized. I told Yudl to write his cousins a letter and explain the conditions in the ghetto to him. “Good,” he said, “let’s write it.” We wrote the letter and sent it off with Kazlovky. A week later, Kazlovsky brought this response written to his cousin: “Come with you wife. The woods are big enough. It’s not a fenced in ghetto. If you are attacked, you can run away.” It was signed: Tuvia Bielski. In the meantime, we began to feel that a massacre was imminent, and we no longer believed the Jewish Council, and Astushinsky and the police. They would always write that it was nothing, that we should just obey and go out to work. Then nothing would happen.

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Every day the police would go into houses, attics, barns, stalls and drive the people out of all these places to work. They would only leave the nursing mothers with their children. The nursing mothers would look with envy at the mothers who were able to go to work, because those would certainly survive and they [the nursing mothers] would have to die. Returning from work, tired, broken, beaten up, every house in the ghetto began to prepare for the massacre. Secret bunkers

¹⁰ 6.2 miles

were dug. In our house a bunker was also dug. We would dig up earth and carry the earth outside to sprinkle in on the street, so that nothing was noticeable. One house didn't know what the other was doing. Everything was done secretly. The children were put to sleep, so that they didn't know anything. Only then did we begin the digging, which lasted all night. In the morning, we had to go to work. Our bunker was finished at the right time, because one morning someone was shouting, "Today, as many people as possible should go out to work," because this is the day we were waiting for

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this whole time. Mothers left their nursing babies; those who were ill got out of bed and left the hospital. Elderly men shaved off their beards so that they looked younger, and everyone ran to work. They thought that would save them. It was said that the safest places were in the orchard workshops, [because] only the privileged were permitted in there: tailors, shoemakers, quilters, carpenters, felt shoe makers, hat makers and mechanics. The rest, the laborers, had to go to the barracks. The barracks were far from the city, at least three kilometers¹¹ away. At about one o'clock at night, people could be seen going to the barracks from the city. Everyone was running to the barracks. It was difficult to get into the workshops in the orchard, because a it was guarded by gendarmes. The barracks were only guarded by Christian peasants, so it was easier to sneak in. We brought our wives to the barracks, so there would at least be someone to save the little children.

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We already saw that it was impossible to save [ourselves], but then we also lost any vain hope. Nevertheless the men tried, from both sides, to save the women both from the barracks as well as

¹¹ 1.86 miles

from the workshops in the orchard. We ran to the ghetto, brought the women, some to the orchard, some to the barracks. Then the Jewish police placed themselves by the gates of the ghetto and asked for money to let anyone out of the ghetto. They asked for 300, 400 and 500 dollars a head. And they wouldn't let anyone who couldn't pay out. Men came from the workshops to the ghetto to get their wives out: Khonye Lipkhin, Shlumke Angeltschik and three others whose names I don't remember, because they were from Warsaw. These the Jewish police did not permit to leave with their wives. They asked for money. The Jewish police were sure that they would remain alive. They bargained the whole night, since they didn't have that kind of money. In the morning, at dawn, the whole ghetto was surrounded by Lithuanians and Germans and they [the Jewish police], themselves, were not permitted to leave.

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These five were taken to the Lithuanian Forest to dig ditches. Then they were shot. They were the first victims of this massacre. In the meantime, masses of people were coming to the barracks from all their work places. We were all as if hypnotized. We didn't know and didn't feel what was going on with us, like a daze [?]. At about four in the afternoon, we were placed in a row. All of the Jews who happened to be at that place, near the barracks. We were all arrayed and surrounded by Gestapo, SS, with machine guns. The Lithuanians and the Security Police arrived from Zhetl, where they had just carried out a massacre. They stopped opposite us, sat on their cars drunk, with their weapons in their hands, ready for another game. Suddenly Maskolov comes out with a work inspector, an SS [named] Lauye (I have already mentioned this Maskolov above) with lists in his hand. He says that any person whose name he calls should identify himself and go the other side. After the liberation by the Soviets, Maskolov was caught, tried and

sentenced to 30 years in Siberia, but a short time later, a rumor spread that the N.K.V.D. had shot him in jail as he tried to escape.

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He called out approximately 550 names. I was also among those called out. The rest remained standing where they were, confused. They already knew what awaited them. Although we were also confused, we thought that we were now going to be led to the ditches behind the barracks. All of a sudden, one man ran away. This was Leybke Lis. He just ran across the field where horses were grazing. The Germans immediately opened fire with their machine guns. They shot 5 horses and wounded him. They ran to the place where he lay wounded and shot him [to death]. We, surrounded by SS, were taken to the horse barns. This was closer to the graves in which there already lay over 4,000 Jews. We were placed in a row, surrounded by machine guns. We were certain that we would soon be shot. We started to say goodbye to one another. People tore up various paper money [they had] from foreign lands, just so that it didn't fall into the hands of the Germans.

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They kept us [standing] there for an hour. Then the Head [?] of the Gestapo arrived, "Red," who had led the massacre, and we were all led into a horse barn. The door was locked. [We had] no water or food, and we had to take care of all our human needs in the horse barn. We were warned not to go near the little windows, because we would be shot immediately. One man, a certain Shvikhanski, from Baranovitsh, lost his mind. His eyes bulged out and he threw himself at everyone, hitting them while shouting, "Oy. Look at what they have made of us! Where are my wife and daughter? Horrors! Horrors!" They were barely able to quiet him down. In the barn, we were so crowded together that we had to stand. We couldn't lie down or sit. The smell was

awful. People fainted, and there was no one to revive them, because we were all in a weakened condition. We were held there in this way for a whole twenty-four hour period. In the evening the Head of the Gestapo came, Red, with more SS and announced that we have the Regional Commissar to thank for letting us

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live. We were led out from the barracks and arrayed in rows of three. For every three there were two SS men with machine guns. We were told that whoever tried to escape would be shot to death on the spot, and we were led to the orchard. The people whose names had not been called in the barracks were led back to the ghetto under strict guards. This happened on Friday. The men who had remained in the barracks and had also brought their wives to the barracks saw their wives being led away. Their wives were saying goodbye from a distance with a wave of their hand, now for the last time. One could not help the other. No one knows who will remain alive: [Will it be] those remaining in the barracks or those being led back to the ghetto. Some people were led back to the ghetto, and everything looked normal in the ghetto, but these people didn't sleep. They stayed awake the whole night. After midnight, Lithuanians, [and] White Russian police arrived, as well as Latvians and Austrians. They surrounded the whole ghetto, and whoever was seen walking around

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in the ghetto was immediately shot dead. The people ran around in the ghetto with their little children like a mouse [sic] in a cage looking for a way to save themselves. The ghetto people who lived in the houses had bunkers. There was not enough room for everyone. Some people thought that perhaps others would save them. And the occupants of the attics, stalls, barns ran around from house to house pleading [to be taken in]. Some were taken into the bunkers, but it was impossible to take everyone in, because there was no room. The first ones to go down into the bunkers were the women with children. They closed themselves in, hid the opening and sat quietly, calmly. At 6 o'clock in the morning on Saturday, the pogrom began. The Lithuanian SS, the Latvians, Austrians [?] and White Russian police went from house to house and those people were led to the ghetto square. They were placed with their face toward the ground, and whoever lifted his eyes from the ground to see what was going on around him was murderously beaten. When they had finished emptying the houses of people, they began to look for bunkers.

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There was one case, in number 20, where one of the women who lived in that house hid in another bunker, but then ran over to her own house and wanted to go down into that bunker, but they couldn't open the door to let her in, because the people there had already camouflaged [the opening?]. An SS man came and caught her. They told her that if she told them where the bunker

was, they would let her live, so she immediately told them where the bunker was. They took 18 women and children out of there. They also took her off to be killed. One woman, [whose family name was] Kolinsbo, was in a bunker with a nursing infant. The child began to cry. They already heard the Gestapo walking around in the house, and she was afraid all of them would be caught because of the child, so they themselves suffocated the child in order to save the rest of them in the bunker. The people in the bunker actually did survive. The Germans could not find the bunkers on their own, so they turned to the Jewish police, who were helping them in this raid, to assist them in locating the bunkers. They too were promised

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their lives. This ruse was discovered by the policeman, Alter Kalmanovitsh, or as he was called in Novaredok, “Alterkye, the thief.” He went straight to the bunker in his house, where his own wife and child were sitting, called her by name and told her to come out. When she came out, it was all over. There were 15-18 people in that bunker. When [the SS] saw the camouflaged door, they took everyone out [to be shot]. In this way, they went from house to house searching and calling out. Not everyone let themselves be duped. And the raid continued in the ghetto. SS men used to come in cars to take people to Litovke, where the ditches were [where the people would be shot] and then return to the ghetto for more people. This raid lasted three days. The people [they caught] were sadistically tortured by having to lie the whole time with their faces to the ground. At night the ghetto was illuminated by projectors¹, and the police would sneak around [to see] if perhaps they could catch someone coming out of a bunker for water or to get rid of their filth. Often, they did catch someone. People couldn’t live in the bunker without water and without ridding themselves of their human waste, so they used to come out. That’s when they would be caught

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and in the process, they would discover the whole bunker. The doctors that took care of the hospital in the ghetto and outside the ghetto, that is the Christian hospital in the city, also needed the medical help of the Jews, because there weren’t any Christian doctors who could take care of their patients. For example, we had a surgeon, a Jew from Warsaw. a specialist in his field, Dr. Berkman and other good doctors: Dr. Isler—venereal disease and skin problems; Dr. Lipshitz, ear, nose and throat; and his wife—women’s illnesses. They used to work in the Christian

¹ Could it be spotlights? [Ed.]

hospital and live in the ghetto. They too lay with their faces down waiting their turn. They had a supervisor in the hospital, a German doctor, an officer in the army, between 55-60 years old. He pleaded with the Head of the SS, Traub, to permit these doctors to stay alive for a while, because there wasn't anyone to take their place. There were no Christian doctors, but there were people who needed their help, and

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they couldn't manage without them. Many wounded Germans would die. So, the Head [of the SS] let the live temporarily. A German came to the ghetto and saved the doctors, got them out of the [massacre] situation and took them [first] to the hospital and then to the orchard. The raid continued to proceed full bore in the ghetto. Germans, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians sadistically tortured their victims, robbed the ghetto of whatever they could, tossed things around: down blanket, pillows for the gentiles that had arrived from the surrounding villages to benefit from the joyous occasion of slaughtering all the Jews. They would scream "The Jews still have plenty of things in the ghetto. When will they die already?" "Why is Hitler still keeping them?" they would shout. They stole, they murdered, many Jewish corpses were lying around in the ghetto. Blood had already been spilled over the whole ghetto. Feathers from torn open down blankets and pillows filled the air. The raid was winding down. They had finished with the people in the ghetto. The Jewish police remained to the end, but they too were told to get in the car: "Your usefulness has come to an end. We don't need you anymore." They all get on the

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car [sic]. The Commandant, Max Ratskovski, went crazy as he got on the car. He got on singing, "Dance dear Jews, dance. Today is your day of judgment. Be happy! Be joyous!" They were all driven away with Alter the Thief, and they were all shot. All of them were placed in the same grave as [the other] people from the ghetto, and the ghetto was without people. The houses were empty. Corpses were strewn all over the ghetto, as was bedding smeared with Jewish blood. Here and there, there was still a bunker with people in it. The SS knows this and they maintain their circle with machine guns and at night continue to illuminate the ghetto with projectors² and watch to see if anyone gets out. They did actually already shoot many people—those who came out during the night to get a little water. Many escapees were caught in town, those who had

² Spotlights? [Ed.]

hidden in the surrounding [fields] of grain and in the woods around the city. Those who were caught were taken temporarily to the jail. And all of us were still sitting in the courtyard of the orchard, because there wasn't enough place inside for everyone. The workshop workers were inside,

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the ones who had saved their wives and some with their children. But the SS came to them looking for children. A certain couple, Leyzer Tshertok and his wife, Fonye, had protected their ten-month-old child, but they took the child from her arms and murdered them in front of their eyes. Several children were hidden in a cellar. They searched and found them, then murdered them until they had killed all the children from the orchard. After they had ended the pogrom in the orchard in the old ghetto, they took 50 men to work in the old ghetto to remodel it and make it smaller. After all, there were no longer so many people. Outside of the workshops in the orchard, there remained only about 500 men, that is laborers, who would live in the Feresyeker Ghetto, and the more skilled workers would live in the orchard. Everyone was very eager to go to work. Everyone's heart beat faster—perhaps they would still find something in the ghetto. I had been crammed into a bunker with great effort and was fortunate enough to be among the 50 men. Under guard, we were taken from the gendarmerie in Feresyeker to the ghetto.

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As we entered the ghetto, we saw before us a horrific scene. Right at the gate, there lay a young man who had been shot to death, Mikhl, the smith from Zalatukhe's son. And as we got deeper into the ghetto, we found in the courtyard gardens, people who had, for the most part, been shot to death. Their facial appearance had changed from lying [so long] in the sun, and it was now difficult to recognize them. Our work consisted in gathering together the dead bodies and burying them, cleaning out the houses, and putting whatever remained on wagons. It [sic] was taken away on a special small wagon for the Germans belonging to the Regional Commander. The first thing everyone did was to run to where they had previously lived. Everyone thought that they might perhaps still find something—a remnant of something that belonged to his wife or child, because there were bunkers in every house, but everything was secret. One neighbor didn't know what was going on the other's house. The only thing that everyone knew was that there was a bunker in every house. I also went to work with the group, which was supposed to clean in the quarter in which I used to live,

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because we, the 50 men, were divided into 4 groups with a German overseer. If it didn't turn out for us to go into the group we wanted, we traded with someone else. In this way, we managed to fit whoever to wherever he needed to go. I myself went with a group to the house where I had lived. We went into the house. So that the German didn't see, I went to the bunker and opened it. I didn't see anyone. I thought I was going to pass out. I got dizzy. I was about to fall, when someone else who had also come down with me caught me under the arms and said to me: "Control yourself. Be strong. This is not the place. You might even pay with your life." I said nothing, because I couldn't speak. My heart was filled with blood [sic]. Only a few days ago I was still with my wife and one-and-a-half yearly child, such a lovely child. All the children were extraordinarily fine. Suddenly I see him covering something up. I asked him what he was covering, and he said, "Nothing." I went over [to him]. I picked up the things and I saw the little body of a child. I took it over to the

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light. I recognized that this was my nephew. I began to cry, and then I fainted. Someone revived me. I opened my eyes and see that a German is standing near me, also overcome with emotion. People had already explained to him that this was my nephew. He said to me: [in German] "Nothing can be done...this was an order from the Führer," and he tells us to bury him immediately, so the SS [man named] Maltshard doesn't see, because he might also shoot me along with the rest of the men. The men start to plead with me to have mercy on them, and three men went right away to dig a ditch behind the barn. The boy died due to a bayonet piercing his neck. We carried him to the ditch. Everyone cried looking at me. We were about to cover the grave, when suddenly, as if from under the earth, the SS man, Maltshard, appeared, and asked what was going on. One of us explained what we were doing and that I was the child's uncle. He took a stick and began to beat me on the back, on my head, wherever he could land a blow. I just stood there as if I were made of stone. He might have killed me, if the men hadn't dragged me away.

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We went to our house. On the way we pass a house and hear someone calling: "People, save me. Give me some water. We are dying. We are dying of thirst." One of us runs off and brings a pot from a vessel that was standing under a roof, a pot full of rain water, because there were no

brooks[?] or pumps in the ghetto. The dead faces looked out at us were black as coal. We could no longer see human eyes, and we could not yet get them up. We tell them that they must still sit there for another day or two until we can bring people to the ghetto. They remain seated, and we take everything out of the house and continued going from house to house. We clean everything out and move on. I and another person went into a latrine, built so that 12 people would be able to go in. One side was for men and the other side for women. We went in and hear moaning. We begin to reach, but we don't see anyone. We can't understand where one could hide there if the ditch was taller than a person. I begin quietly asking. "Where are you? Who is there?" Only then does a wild, horrific face move into view. One could choke just on the gases. "Save us! We have been lying here in this filthy water five

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days. Save us. Give us a little water. We can't last much longer." I run away and bring them a pot of water and hand it to her. I tell the other one to watch so that no German was approaching. I ask her quietly how did it happen that they hid there. She explains to me: "I am here with one of my sisters-in-law. We are from Karelitsh, (Later they were with me as partisans and remained alive.) when the shooting began in the ghetto on Friday night. We were living in a barn. We didn't have a bunker, so we ran from house to house begging for someone to let us into a bunker. Finally, no one responded. Everyone was already sitting in a bunker hiding, so no one answered. So I said to my sister-in-law, "Come, we will go and hide in the latrine. When we got to the latrine, one girl from Novaredok was already standing there. We also went down, and for three days we stood there together. By the third day, the girl from Novaredok could no longer stand it and began to moan just as a German came in. He heard the moaning and began to search for its source. Then he noticed her and shot her. He didn't find us. She is still lying here. Two days later, when we go to the ghetto, she was taken out and buried. It was Mincer's daughter.

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Starting Here [to Talk] About the Partisans

Still being locked in the barracks with shooting going on all around, I, my brother, Yakov and Peysakh Freedberg, the brothers Mothke and Are Libtshansky, Yudl Levin, Zlatnik and Bielsky decided that if we left alive, we wouldn't remain in the ghetto for much longer, and we would go into the woods. So after spending a few more days in the barracks without any bread or water, the murderer Red came to the barracks and explained that we were going to remain alive, and for

sparing our lives we have the Regional Commissar to thank. We were led out of the barracks into the courtyard. We were placed in rows of three. Estonians, Lithuanians, Latvians and Germans with machine guns in their hands surround us and tell us that we are being taken to the orchard. Along the way, we decided³ that we were being taken to the Peresiker Ghetto. When we arrived in Peresike, we all settled into one room. We did not go to work. We turned to the so-called Police Commandant of the ghetto, Lazar Malbin, and confided in him that we had decided to go into the woods, and we didn't want to be listed anywhere, so that no one knew we had been there, because work details could be created at any time in the Peresiker Ghetto, and⁴

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we were told that everyone would get a number, so we didn't want it to have the Jews in the ghetto on our conscience. Malbin agreed, and he didn't send us out to work, so we began to prepare to leave for the woods.

Our Connection with Kaslovsky

Near Markets, in a valley [?] lived a certain Kaslovsky. He was a friend to the Jews. He was raised with the Jewish "rascals in Markets." He spoke a good Yiddish, and he was a friend of the Jews. He used to come to the ghetto every day to bring tobacco to the ghetto, saccharine⁵ [?], bread, cereal, bring letters from the Novaredok Ghetto and the Lider Ghetto. He risked his life more than once for us Jews. And he brought us the news that the Bielsky family, and the Milner family from Osmetova, and the Dzhientsielskis from Isve were hiding in the Batshkovitsher Woods. [So he asked] "Why were we still sitting in the ghetto and waiting for death?" He told us also to go into the woods. At the same time, he told us that they come to his house almost every night. When we learned this from him, we decided to send a letter through him to the Bielsky's and asked him to bring us their answer. We wrote a letter with a question: "May we

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come to the forest?" And we got an answer signed Tevye. "The forest is big enough and it is not a fenced in ghetto. If Germans attack, there are places to escape." We decide that we are leaving the ghetto. We don't know the way. We ask Kaslovsky how to get there. We decide to go to him

³ Realized? [Ed.]

⁴ At bottom of page 89: 2007.112.16

⁵ Could be sugar or an artificial sweetener. [Ed.]

and the Bielski's will come to him to get us, and we will go with them. He tells us the way more or less. We make a plan and decide which way we should leave. We tear away two boards and leave them hanging only by a few nails as a camouflage. We do this by day, so that no rustling will be heard at night. Time passes so slowly. Every hour is a day. We barely make it to nightfall. Everyone is waiting in our room. It is decided who should go, because in the meantime the group got bigger. In the end, I am going, as are Freedberg, Are Levin, Yudl and his wife Ida. At the same time,

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a certain Motke Smulevitz from Shelib attaches himself to us. My brother and Aferke [?] Lubtshanski's brother still remain in the ghetto. After we arrived in the woods and attach ourselves to some partisan group there, two of our men were supposed to come bring the brothers, and the others who were left behind. All of us are ready to leave. One man stands and observes the police guard around the ghetto to see the of mood they are in. They see that the projectors around the ghetto, which illuminate the ghetto every five minutes. We wait for an opportune moment. We were all on edge, but we finally made it to 9 o'clock in the evening and decided to go. One by one we leave the house. At the fence, we all have to lie down and wait until all of us are there, We have to lay there so that the German at the projector doesn't notice us. When we are all there, I am the first to open the two boards of the fence and the first to go [through], and the rest follow silently behind me. When we get out, we begin to run, because the police patrol might still see us as we leave and begin to shoot at us. We run until the Dube's [house]. A Polish Captain's wife used to live there. We used to say "up to the Captain's wife." The trees were

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very dense there, this was already about one kilometer⁶ from the ghetto. The night was very dark and warm. There were many stars in the sky. This was in the month of July 1942. We rested after running, and consult about where to go. We decide to go toward Slukhavitsh but to avoid the village. From there, we have to go to Lodsyenik, but I avoid that village, because there are five or six policemen from there are in the German police force, so we need to be very careful. From Lodsyenik, we need to go to the Lider Highway, then take that road for twelve kilometers⁷ to a

⁶ .6 of a mile [Ed.]

⁷ 7.5 miles [Ed.]

side path which then turns left near a small woods. Kozlovski's house should be near those woods. We make a plan as to how to go, and we get going. Now it is eleven [o'clock]. The summery night is very short. At two thirty it is already beginning to get light, so we must hurry. We go! We avoid Slukhavitsh and walk through the woods. We reach Lodsyenik. The village is before our eyes. It is a large village. We see it clearly from the edge of the woods. Kozlovski also told us to avoid that village. We start to walk on, [intending to avoid

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the village] but at the edge of the village, we somehow got lost and went into the village. We begin to run and run through the little piece of village. We can already see beyond the village. We already begin to feel a bit free. We march to the road, already a little happier. Now we are on the road. We count the kilometers as we walk. We go as far as the twelfth kilometer. We see the little path and take that. There are woods on both sides until we exit onto a large clearing [?] and see several huts. Kozlovski told us that his father lived in one of these huts and that we should be careful not to go into his father's hut, because if his father were to know, he would not be able to keep us with him. We walk very carefully and look into every hut. We wander around carefully for several hours. It is almost dawn, and we must find a way to get out, but we can't find Kozlovski. Finally I say to Yudl, "Come, we'll take a chance. Let's go into this hut." He agrees with me. We let our people let stand in the woods. We leave our bundles, and he and I carefully approach the hut. I enter through the window and recognize Kozlovski sleeping on the mat [?] near the oven. I quietly knock on the window.

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He hears and immediately runs to the window. He is delighted to see us. He pulls on his pants and goes right out into the street. We tell him who is here and how we got there. He walks with us to the little woods that grows near the road. He is happy to see everyone and asks us if anyone saw us. We tell him that we didn't ask [direction of] anyone. He tells that we have to stay in the woods the whole day until night, when the Bielski's come, and then we'll go with them. Then Ida and Yudl begin to plead with him that since she is afraid to be in the woods could he permit her to remain up in his attic during the day. He lets her, and we stay in the woods. He led us to a densely overgrown place and tells us that we should sit here the whole day, because the shepherds bring their cows here to pasture, and if they notice us we are lost. We assure him that we will be careful, and we tell him that we have nothing to eat. He promises us that he will boil a

pot of potatoes, and at the same time he'll bring us a pitcher of water and that will have to last us the whole day. We remain in the woods and they all [sic] return to the house. We lay down among the saplings, tired from

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our trek, my clothes drenched with sweat. We all lie down together, cover ourselves with our blankets and immediately fall asleep. We don't know how long we slept. We were awakened by the banging of axes and the lowing of cows. We hear the shepherd talking close nearby. We look out and see the shepherds, the cows. We lie there holding our breaths. Suddenly we hear steps. Someone is coming towards us. We lie there and tremble. We look out and see Kozlovski wandering around looking for us. We give him a sign and he looks our way. He brought us a pot of potatoes and a pitcher of water. "And this" he says, "will have to last you the whole day. I don't have any bread. At night, when it will be very dark, you'll come to my house and wait until twelve o'clock. Then Bielshishki," as he called them, "will certainly come. Or Dzyentsyelski." We sat there and waited the whole day, anxiously awaiting the night. At night we go to Kozlovski's house. We come in tired to warm ourselves up a bit. He had made a bouillon and baked some *lepyashkes*⁸ to go with the bouillon. We ate with a good appetite. After eating we put out the fire and wait for someone from the Bielski's to come and get us.

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We waited until three o'clock [in the morning] and no one came. The gentile kept on crossing himself. "What could have happened? They used to come every night, and now that they know you are here, they don't come." He couldn't understand it. We waited like this a whole week, and no one came. Every night we sat near Kozlovski's house until dawn. It became impossible to sit in the little woods. Gentiles used to come into the woods. Shepherds used to bring their cows. The small wood was, after all, near the Lider Road. One could hear cars with Germans go by. It was on the eighth day, a Sunday, we were lying in the woods with no hope that the Bielski's would come to get us. We were discussing among ourselves what we should do. No one even thought of going back to the ghetto. The only decision we had was to divide ourselves up in pairs of two and go into the villages looking for a way to connect to the partisans. Yudl Levin said that he would go to Fanikart, because he is from there, and he knows all the gentiles. And we should

⁸ A type of flatbread similar to Indian naan [Ed.]

to Batshkavits Kaminke, and we should, at all cost, reunite in three days' time at the Kozlovski's. As we were lying and discussing this quietly, shooting breaks out in the woods.

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A distressing quiet filled the woods. The silence choked us, pressed on our souls, it simply suffocated us. Suddenly we heard a familiar whistle. We understood that Kozlovski had come to us. We became so happy that he had arrived. Then we had a fearful thought—perhaps he had come to tell us that we should leave this place, because someone had noticed us and were searching for us. But when we saw his face, we saw that he was beaming with joy. He immediately began to talk to us: “Don't be afraid. The shooting means nothing. They weren't shooting at you.” Eight policemen came to the village to get a policeman who had gotten drunk and didn't want to return to the police station in Novaredok. Then they too got drunk and they began to shoot into the woods as they passed by. I have to confess that this Christian was like an angel to us. He protected us like the apple of his eye the whole time we sat in the woods close to the Lider Road, and we sat in those woods for more than three weeks. Every night went [into the woods] and waited for the Bielskis until two o'clock at night [sic], and they didn't come.

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Sitting in the woods for three weeks was unbearable. We felt that we really couldn't sit there any longer, because we would get caught. Once, it was a Friday evening. We had finished the bouillon, and we decided to carry out the decision that we had made lying in the woods before the shooting [began]—to go look for a connection to the partisans. We go out of the house. We say our good-byes, and begin to walk each one in his own manner with the thought: G-d only knows if we will meet again. After taking only a few steps away from the house, there was a large fire. Everything all-around was bright and we heard the noise of airplanes. All of us instinctively returned to Kozlovski's house, and all of us sat down on the ground around the house, Kozlovski with us. And he begins to plead with us: “Children, don't leave. These are Soviet airplanes. You'll see. Everything will be fine.” Suddenly we see that the airplanes have dropped rockets. And everything all around was illuminated. Kozlovski shouts to us: “Children, the Soviets are dropping parachutists into Hutch. They are dropping troops and supplies.” It seemed to us, in our imaginations that the Soviets were actually already quite close and we are being freed.

