

THE UPRISING IN KREMENETS
AN EXCERPT FROM
THE HOLOCAUST OF VOLHYNIAN JEWS, 1941-1944
BY
SHMUEL SPECTOR

The following excerpt is from the chapter "Rescue and Resistance, 7. The uprising in Kremenets", pp. 220-223. The bibliography extract is page 372:

Spector, Shmuel (1990). *The holocaust of Volhynian Jews, 1941-1944*.
Jerusalem: Yad Vashem & The Federation of Volhynian Jews.

[220]

7. The uprising in Kremenets

On August 9, 1942, some fifteen hundred workers, including the staff of the Judenrat and the policemen, were removed from the ghetto to Bialokrynitsa, some 7 km. distance from the town of Kremenets. The ghetto was closed. The next day, August 10, the Germans began assembling the Kremenets Jews and taking them to the shooting pits. At this point fighting broke out between groups of armed Jewish youths and the German and Ukrainian policemen. The ghetto was set on fire and burned for seven days.

With the exception of those taken away on the first day or those who had fled prior to the liquidation and the fighting, there were no survivors. Information about the uprising reached Jewish witnesses mainly through Polish residents of Kremenets. The testimony closest in time to the events in question is to be found in the memoirs of Peretz Goldstein of Hoshcha who, as we recall, wrote them while hiding in the home of a Polish family. It is possible that the family members told him the story of events in Kremenets. Here is what he wrote:

I am told that the same thing happened in Kremenets [namely, an uprising broke out similar to the uprisings in Tuchin and Mizoch. We couldn't know whether this information is true or not. It is possible that the murderers blow these events out of proportion on purpose with the view of setting the peasants against the Jews so that when a Jew comes to a village asking for shelter the Gentile will turn him over.]⁽⁵⁴⁾

54 *Hoshcha Memorial Book (in Yiddish)*, p. 25. It is evident that Goldstein was of two minds concerning the truthfulness of the information in his possession.

[221]

A more detailed account of the uprising is to be found in the book *Underground Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps* (in Polish), which draws on the testimonies of Polish residents of Kremenets and on the testimony of a young Jewish woman of Shumsk, some 20 km. distance from Kremenets, who studied at the Kremenets Gymnasium and knew many Jewish and Polish youths.⁽⁵⁵⁾

55 *Ruch podziemny*, pp. 98-99; testimony of Frieda Bernstein, protocol. *Yiddisher Historisher Institut in Poyln*, no. 302 in MA A.537 and also in YVA E/646. At present Frieda Bernstein lives in Tel Aviv. In a conversation with the author on January 25, 1981, she revealed that the first news about the uprising itself reached her in the Shumsk ghetto, which was liquidated after the Kremenets ghetto. She herself escaped with her father and was hidden by Poles from whom she heard about the uprising. After the liberation of the area she returned to Shumsk where she stayed for half a year, working at a Soviet office. During that time she made frequent visits to Kremenets where she met with her Polish acquaintances from whom she heard about the uprising in the Kremenets ghetto. In 1945 she resettled in Lodz where she gave her testimony before the Historical Commission.

The lack of any reference to the uprising in the memorial book of the community remains puzzling. More than that: the editors of the book write (p. 270): "The chapters on the Holocaust raise the question: did the Jews of Kremenets put up resistance to the Nazi murderers? Two authors testify that no organized resistance evolved in Kremenets." On January 20, 1981, this author met with Mr. M.G., a member of the editorial board, who revealed to him that the main witness on the period of the Holocaust, on whose testimony the aforementioned conclusion was based, was a policeman in the ghetto. Since the prevailing opinion on the Jewish police in Kremenets was negative, we can assume that the underground organization in the ghetto abstained from ties with policemen, which would explain their ignorance of the matter. Furthermore, the said witness, B.S. (see his testimony, YVA 03/2037) was removed to Bialokrynitsa on August 9 and therefore was absent on the next day when the liquidation and the resistance began.

The editors of the *Kremenets Memorial Book* knew neither about the existence of the memoirs of Peretz Goldstein of Hoshcha nor of the chapter devoted to the Kremenets uprising in the book *Ruch podziemny*, op.cit., compiled by Betti Ajzensztajn (a native of Volhynia, a teacher in Ostróg, who spent the Holocaust there). Similarly, they did not see the testimony of Frieda Bernstein and did not hear the testimonies of Polish witnesses. They learned of this testimony in 1980 when one of the activists of the Kremenets Landsmanschaft saw a summary of several lines in *The Book of the War of the Ghettos* edited by Zukerman and Basok. This information was published in a booklet "Voice of the Native Residents of Kremenets and Shumsk" (in Hebtew), no. 17 (December 1980), p.42.

[223]

According to this witness, five or six days before the liquidation two youths, Lusik Shapiro and Rachiner, friends from Kremenets, visited Shumsk. They told her that there was a Jewish underground organization in the ghetto commanding many weapons and grenades. Members of this organization were furnished with forged Aryan papers enabling them to move freely in and out of the ghetto. Their plan provided for leaving the ghetto on the eve of the *Aktion* and attacking the German guards positioned outside with the view of preventing them from penetrating into the ghetto. After the battle was over, the fighters were supposed to assemble in the woods at an appointed place and set up a partisan unit. They offered the witness to join them but she refused for family reasons. On August 9, 1942, without any warning signs, the ghetto was surrounded, thus locking the underground members within its walls. The next day, August 10, when the removal of the Jews commenced, they launched an attack within the ghetto. On the first day of fighting 6 German and Ukrainian policemen were killed on the second day 10 died in the fighting. On the third day the young resisters started setting fire to the ghetto houses, which burned for a whole week.

Some of these facts were confirmed by Polish witnesses. Thus, the existence of arms in the ghetto they explained by saying that they came from a clandestine Polish depot located in a house, which was annexed to the ghetto. When the ghetto was sealed, the Poles were suddenly deprived of access to it. The Polish witnesses also confirmed that fighting took place in the ghetto and that the Jews set it on fire. Some of these witnesses presumed that the Germans set the fire to flush out the Jews from their hideouts.⁽⁵⁶⁾ An explanation along these lines was also provided by a principal Jewish witness whose testimony forms the bulk of the section dealing with the Holocaust in the memorial book of the Kremenets community. However, this explanation raises serious doubts. Small towns in general and the ghettos in particular consisted of wooden houses. In hot summer weather the fire spread rapidly into the town itself. We do not know of a single case in Volhynia when the Germans took the risk of burning an entire township. At the same time, in the documented incidents of premeditated conflagration (Tuchin, Turiysk, Mizoch, Korets and others) the Jews themselves set fire to their abodes with the view of causing confusion and creating conditions facilitating mass escape. This would indicate that the Kremenets ghetto was the scene of an uprising, which was similar to uprisings in other ghettos of Volhynia.

56. The person who examined the testimony of Frieda Bernstein wrote a note to this effect on the margins.

[372]

Excerpt from Bibliography

- Luczak, Czesław, *Polityka ludnościowa i ekonomiczna hitlerowskich Niemiec w okupowanej Polsce*, Poznań, 1979.
- Małyszczycy, Zbigniew, *Partyzanci z Polesia. z dziejów brygady AL im. Wandy Wasilewskiej*, Warsaw, 1974.
- Martinez, Codo Enrique, "Guerilla Warfare in the Ukraine," *The Ukrainian Quarterly*, New York, vol. 17. no. 3 (1961), pp. 204-218.
- Medvedev, Dimitri, *Silnye dukhom*, Moscow, 1957.
- Medvedev, Dimitri, *Eta bylo pod Rovno*, Moscow, 1958.
- Nimetsko-Fashistskii okypalsiyni rezhim, Kiev, 1963.
- Novak, Terentii, *Perot znayut nemnogie*, Moscow, 1966.
- Pankivsii, Kos'. *Roki nimetskoi okupatsii*, New York, 1965.
- Polacy-Żydzi 1939-1945, Opracowali Stanisław Wronski i Maria Zwolakowa, Warsaw, 1971.
- Polish-Soviet Relations 1918-1943, Official Documents, Washington (1943).
- Polskie siły zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej, vol 3, London, 1959.
- Prokopiuk, Nicolai, "Na zachodnim brzegu Bugu, ze wspomnień partyzanta," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, no. 3, Warsaw, 1961, pp. 257-260.
- Rosenblatt, Gad, *Fire Swept over the Forest*, Tel-Aviv, 1967 (Hebrew).
- Rosensohn, Nethanel, *On the Paths and in the Forests in Kovpak's Brigade*, Tel-Aviv, 1978 (Hebrew).
- Ruch podziemny w gettach i obozach: materiały i dokumenty*. Opracowała Betti Ajzensztajn, Warsaw, 1946.
- Rueckerl, Adalbert, *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungslager im Spiegel deutscher Strafprozesse*, Munich, 1977.
- Rudnev, C.V., *Legendarnyi reid*, Uzhgorod, 1967.
- Saburov, Alexander, *Otvoyevannaya vesna*, Moscow, 1968.
- Saburov, Alexander, *siły neizchislimyie*, Moscow, 1967.
- Saburov, Alexander, *U druzey odni dorogi*, Moscow, 1963.
- Samuels, Gertrude, *Motele, a Partisan Odyssey*, New York, 1976.
- Schneider Leon, *Like a Hunted Animal*, Tel-Aviv, 1977 (Hebrew).
- Shushkanov, Genadii, *V lesakh Volyni; zapiski partizana*, Moscow, 1970.
- Sobiesiak. Józef, *Przebraże*, Warsaw, 1964.
- Sobiesiak, Józef, "7 walk brygady partyzanckiej im. Frunzego na Wołyniu," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, Warsaw, no. 4 (1962), pp. 228-258.
- Sobiesiak, Józef and Jegorów Ryszard, *Ziemia płonie*, Warsaw, 1961.
- Sobotka, Mieczysław, *Między Turą a Bugiem*, Olsztyn-Białystok, 1980.
- Stafiychuk, J., *Komsomol Ukrainy v partizanskom dvizhenii 1941-1944*, Moscow 1968.
- Strutinskii, Nicolai, *Na beregakh Horyni i Sluchi*. Lvov, 1966.
- Strutinskii, Nicolai, *Podvig*, Lvov, 1964.
- Strutinskii, Nicolai and Dranov, C. *Pobediushyie smert*, Moscow, 1967.
- Szota. Wiesław, "Zarys rozwoju Organizacji Ukraińskich Nacjonalistów i Ukraińskiej Powstańczej Armii," *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, Warsaw, no. 1 (1963). pp. 167-202.
- The Book of Jewish Partisans*, Merkhavia 2 vols. 1958 (Hebrew).