Odessa

Port city in the Ukraine, situated on the shores of the Black Sea. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Odessa was an important Jewish and Zionist center. In 1939 some 201,000 Jews lived in the city.

Germany and Romania established a siege on Odessa on August 5, 1941; the city surrendered on October 16. Before the siege, about half of Odessa's Jews managed to escape, and by October the Jewish population had dwindled to about 90,000. *Einsatzkommando* 11B and a group of Romanian troops immediately massacred over 8,000 of the city's inhabitants; most were Jews.

As soon as the Germans and Romanians took control of Odessa, they designated the city as the capital of the newly-coined Transnistria region, which the Germans turned over to Romania. On October 22 the Romanian military headquarters were blown up, killing 66 officers and soldiers. In retaliation, the leader of Romania, Ion Antonescu, ordered the execution of thousands of communists. He also ordered that one member of every Jewish family in Odessa be taken hostage. The next day, 19,000 Jews were taken to the harbor, where they were burnt alive. Another 20,000 Jews were gathered and taken to a nearby village, where they were shot or burnt to death. In addition, many Jews were sent to camps throughout Transnistria.

Between October 25 and November 3, 1941, the remaining Jews in Odessa - some 40,000 - were taken outside the city to the Slobodka Ghetto. They were left outside for 10 days; many old people, women, and children froze to death. On November 7 the men were gathered in the local jail. On January 12, 1942 the Romanians began deporting them to camps throughout Transnistria. By February 23 over 19,000 Jews had been deported. Most of those Jews who had not been deported were either killed by Germans who had resettled the area, or died from starvation, exposure, and disease.

Odessa was liberated by the Soviet army on April 10, 1944. Out of the original 201,000 Jews 99,000 of the city's Jews had perished.