

Kazinets, Isay Pavlovich

Secretary of the Minsk Under-Ground Urban Committee Of the Communist Party of Byelorussia

At a terrible time of great shock and ordeals of the human soul, a man was found among the ruins of Minsk who tore aside the cloud of uncertainty and instilled in people faith in victory. He sought out and united more than 20 partisan underground groups, organized regular work for underground printers, distributed illegal newspapers and leaflets, found a way of penetrating concentration camps and arranging for the incarcerated to escape.

Thus wrote K.D. Grigoryev, former member of the Minsk Underground Urban Committee of the Communist Party about Isay (Yehuda) Pavlovich (Pinkhusovich) Kazinets.

On the shores of the Sea of Azov there is a small town called Genichesk. It was there that a son was born to the Kazinets family in 1910 whom they named Yehuda. The father, Pinkhus, was a worker who fought in the civil war in Russia. In 1920, he was brutally murdered by Cossacks. Five small children were left dependent on their mother. Among them was ten-year old Yehuda-Isay. He and two others were placed in a children's home.

Isay grew to be tall and thin. He was a serious youngster, full of energy, and a good student. His mother was proud of her successful son, who was especially dear to her because he so closely resembled his father in looks and habits.

Isay started his working life at 16 when he became an apprentice locksmith at the Main Petroleum Marketing Center in Batumi. On completion of secondary school he entered the Petroleum Institute and graduated in 1938. He worked in Kalinin, Gorki and was then transferred to Minsk.

Chief of the Byelorussian Republic office of the Main Petroleum Marketing Center, Konstantin Grigoryev, loved the energetic young man. However, it

was difficult to find quarters in Minsk and since Isay wanted his wife and two children with him, he requested to be transferred to another city where living quarters could be found. Thus he was sent to Bialystok as chief engineer of the local branch of the Main Petroleum Marketing Center.

Bialystok was close to the border. The peaceful life of Kazinets did not last long.

That fateful Sunday of June 22, 1941 arrived. The town was filled with the roar of bombers, explosions, shrieks, of the wounded, sirens, streets on fire and bodies lying in pools of blood.

Isay evacuated his family but remained behind to destroy the petrol tanks to ensure that the enemy would not receive a single drop of fuel. The German army arrived very soon after and Kazinets left the town with only the clothes on his back. Together with units of the Red Army he marched to the east.

The difficult trek began. Thousands of people crowded the roads but were stopped by German patrol squads. Like many other refugees, Isay could not flee the rapid German onslaught. He found himself on territory occupied by the enemy. Managing to reach Minsk he found the Byelorussian capital in ruins — fires were burning everywhere and entire streets had been destroyed. Isay hurried to Grigoryev's home but found that it had been burned down. After searching for a few days he finally found Grigoryev. The meeting was warm but sad. Kazinets and Grigoryev became involved in preparing false documents for under-ground work. Kazinets became the Tartar, Mustapha Delikurdi-Ogly. He could pass as a Tartar because of his swarthy face.

Isay was not disposed to sitting idle. The occupiers had to be shown that their lives would not be quiet here. He discussed the situation with Grigoryev. Some people had lost heart. It was necessary to instill in them faith in victory. They had to be convinced that, despite their initial successes, the Germans would ultimately be defeated.

Isay succeeded in finding a radio and soon people were listening to news broadcasts by the Soviet Information Bureau. At the same time a Party center for the resistance movement was being formed in Minsk. Within a few months about 20 underground Party and Komsomol groups were established.

A meeting of representatives of some of these groups was held at the beginning of December 1941 at a hideout on 5 (now 34) Lugovaya Street. An urban underground Party committee was chosen which included K.A. Grigoryev, S.I. Zayats (Zaytsev), I.P. Kazinets, G.M. Semyonov, and V.S. Zhudro. Kazinets was elected secretary of the committee.

A new chapter of ordeals, danger, and responsibilities opened in the life of Kazinets. This was his lot until the end of his heroic life.

The minutes of this historic meeting, which recorded Isay's underground name — Slavka — have been preserved to this day. Kazinets carried the identity papers of his friend, Vyacheslav Yurygin, who had been killed on the way from Bialystok to Minsk.

Members of the cell organization would know their secretary only by his underground name. This would prevent provocateurs from penetrating the cell.

The Committee would be guided in setting up partisan groups, etc., by underground groups of railway workers, and people from the ghetto, the Law Institute, and the military council.

With the formation of this committee, diversionary activities of the underground intensified. Its aim was to destroy enemy transport. Underground railway workers poured sand into the axle boxes of rolling stock, froze the engine drums, protracted repairs. Two pump houses and a water tower were put out of commission. Fifty steam engines were frozen.

At factories and plants the underground workers impeded production, delayed raw materials, broke equipment and instruments, and pierced parachutes made at a local enterprise.

The committee devoted particular attention to reconnaissance. A close watch was kept on the movement of military echelons to and from the front.

"Slavka" was indefatigable. People who worked with him and survived the war told of his diligence and courage and selfassurance. Under his firm hand the resistance movement in the city expanded.

At a meeting in November 1941, Slavka said:

"We are at war. We only hear Moscow but cannot establish contact with it. But the Party has appealed to all who have remained in occupied territory to create underground organizations, partisan units and diversionary groups".

A Gestapo document concerning Kazinets' activities was found after his arrest. It read:

"Propaganda and intelligence material were supplied by Kazinets... He received communications from a certain, as yet uncaptured, "Zhorzh". This "Zhorzh" had two receivers in his apartment... Kazinets transmitted his information to the committee by the (also arrested) radio operator. In addition they collected other information, had it printed in a secret press and then distributed it in the form of leaflets. The press was in one of the buildings near the ghetto... The press also carried out commissions for partisan groups outside Minsk..."

A special chapter in the underground activity of Isay Kazinets concerned his close ties with the Minsk ghetto, of which eyewitness testimony survives.

In July 1941, a Jewish ghetto was established in Minsk. In spite of the terrible conditions there, the courageous inhabitants, notwithstanding the dangers they faced, organized a struggle against the Nazi murderers and their lackeys. On learning that an underground organization had formed in the ghetto, Kazinets tried to establish contact with it. Anton Zubkovski argued with him:

"Why should you personally go to the ghetto? You are the secretary. Don't we have enough people to send? Food and supplies can be collected without you. That's the work of the group leaders..."

Slavka thrust his hands through his thick hair and shook his head thoughtfully. "No, Anton, that's not the point. Supplies and ammunition can be collected without me and delivered to the partisans. But I made the acquaintance of an interesting man there — Skromny. Did you ever hear of someone with that name?"

"I can't say I have."

"It's the underground name of Smolyar. He used to work in the Comintern in Western Byelorussia and his work was magnificent."

"We should bring him here," said Zubkovski.

"We don't have to bring him," said Slavka, "he can come himself. He knows every exit and entry. That's the kind of person we need. He speaks readily about everything. I have learned a lot from him. That's why I go."

Hersh Smolyar, in his book *Fun Minsker getto* (Yiddish) wrote:

"The first meeting of the organizational center of the ghetto with Comrade Slavka, the representative of the urban committee, took place. We told him about the situation in the ghetto and he promised us all help. For his part, Kazinets asked the comrades in the ghetto to set up a fund of medical supplies, clothes and to do everything they could to establish a press."

Smolyar noted that this meeting with Slavka gave the ghetto fighters' courage and strength. And, in fact, a press was soon set up and turned over to the printer and ghetto resident, Misha Chivchin.

The press regularly printed leaflets, bulletins, and information on the front, which revealed the lies of Hitler's propaganda. Kazinets retained close contact with the ghetto and met often with the resistance leaders there.

The Minsk urban committee and its leader, Isay Kazinets, played a major role in the organization of partisan units, reinforcing them, supplying guns, ammunition and medical supplies. The Germans did everything within their power to uncover the underground in Minsk. Their spies from the *Abwehr* and secret police infiltrated underground organizations.

In March 1942, mass arrests of underground workers started. The military council of the partisan movement was smashed. Its leaders, I. Rogov, I. Byelov, and P. Antokhin, having fallen into the hands of the Germans, betrayed the movement and revealed the names of people actively engaged in the underground.

For a long time the Germans had been trying to penetrate the underground in order to wipe it out at one blow. Gestapo agents wormed their way into the

midst of those they suspected, trying to gain their confidence. Their aim was the military council and its chain of connections.

Suddenly the enemy struck the first blow at the weakest link — the military council, which like any headquarters had documents and lists of members. Valuable information fell into the hands of the Gestapo. The tie between the military council and the city underground was exposed. The council members did not even withstand the first interrogation and betrayed the underground.

Kazinets immediately passed news of the danger along the chain. He ordered members to change their flats, their appearance, their documents. He himself changed his flat.

In his last note to comrades in the ghetto, Kazinets wrote that the time had come to join the partisans outside. "By setting up gallows on the streets of Minsk, by executing scores of resistance fighters, the occupiers count on frightening the anti-Fascists, but they will not succeed. Our fearless fighters will continue their heroic struggle against the worst enemies of mankind — the troops of Hitler."

Before leaving the city to join the partisans, Kazinets decided to go to the hideout in order to meet with couriers of the partisan detachment that he was to join on March 27, 1942. When he and underground worker Rovinskaya entered the apartment, the Gestapo was waiting for them. On that day scores of other underground workers were arrested.

For 40 days Kazinets was tortured, his body literally being torn to pieces, but he remained silent. On May 7, 1942, the hangmen brought the bloodied and maimed Isay Kazinets to the city park where they had set up a gallows. When the executioner placed the noose around his neck, Kazinets kicked him with every bit of strength he had left and the executioner fell off the stand. Kazinets' last words were: "Death to Fascism!"

Thus ended the life of the heroic fighter, Isay Kazinets.

On May 8, 1965, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union posthumously to Isay Pavlovich Kazinets for special merit, steadfastness, and heroism in the struggle against the German Fascist occupiers.

A street in Minsk bears the name of the Hero. A film that was made about the Minsk anti-Fascist underground during the Nazi occupation deals in great part with the heroic activities of Isay Kazinets.

Source: Gershon Shapiro (Ed.), *Under Fire, the Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1988 pp. 219-225