

The Revolt at the Sobibor Extermination Camp*

...as though in response to an order, several axes that had been hidden under coats appeared and were brought down on his head. At that moment the convoy from the second camp approached. A few women who were frightened by what they saw began to scream, some even fainted. Some began to run crazily, without thinking and without purpose. In that situation there was no question of organizing or maintaining order, and therefore I shouted at the top of my voice: "Forward, comrades!"

"Forward!" someone echoed behind me on the right.

"For the Fatherland, for Stalin, forward!"

The proud cries came like thunder from clear skies in the death camp. In one moment these slogans united the Jews of Russia, Poland, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Germany. Six hundred men who had been abused and exhausted broke into cries of "Hurrah!" for life and freedom.

The assault on the arms store failed. Machine-gun fire barred our way.

Most of the people who were escaping turned in the direction of the main gate. There, after they finished off the guards, under cover of fire from the rifles that a few of them had, they threw stones and scattered sand in the eyes of the Fascists who stood in their way, broke through the gate and hurried in the direction of the forest.

One group of prisoners turned left. I saw how they attacked the barbed-wire fence. But after they had cleared away this obstacle, they still had to cross a minefield that was about 15 meters wide. Many of them surely fell here. I turned towards the Officer House with a group of prisoners; we cut the barbed wire there and so made an opening. The assumption that the area near the Officers' House would not be mined proved correct.

Three of our comrades fell near the barbed wire, but it was not clear whether they stepped on mines or were wounded by bullets, as salvos were fired on us from various directions.

We are already on the far side of the fence, and the minefield is behind us. We have already gone 100 meters, then another 100... fast, still faster... we must cross the bare, open area where we are exposed to the bullets of the

murderers... fast, still faster, we must get to the forest, get among the trees, get into shelter... and already we are in the shade of the trees.

I stopped for a moment to catch my breath and cast a glance backwards. Exhausted, with their last strength, running bent over, forwards... we were near the forest. Where is Loka? Where is Shlomo?

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...It is difficult to say for certain how many people escaped from the camp. In any case, it is clear that the great majority of the prisoners escaped. Many fell in the open space that was between the camp and the forest. We were agreed that we should not linger in the forest, but divide up into small groups and go in different directions. The Polish Jews escaped in the direction of Chelm. They were drawn there by their knowledge of the language and the area. We, the Soviets, turned east. The Jews who had come from Holland, France and Germany were particularly helpless. In all the wide area that surrounded the camp there was none with whom they had a common language.

The shots from machine-guns and rifles that rattled behind us from time to time helped us to decide on the direction that we needed. We knew that the shooting came from the camp. The telephone line had been cut, and Franz had no way of calling for help. The echo of the shots became more distant and disappeared.

It was already beginning to get dark when we once more heard shots echoing far away. Probably they came from our pursuers....

We began to march.

From time to time, from one side or the other, we were joined by new people. I questioned all of them whether they had seen Loka or Shlomo. Nobody had seen them.

We emerged from the forest. We walked for 3 kilometers over open fields, until we reached an open canal about 5 or 6 meters wide. The canal was very deep, and it was not possible to cross it on foot. When I tried to walk around it, I observed a group of people at a distance of about 50 meters from us. We dropped flat on the ground and sent out Arkadiosh to reconnoiter. At first he

crawled on his stomach, but after a minute he got to his feet and ran up to the people. A few minutes later he was back.

"Sasha, they are some of our people. They found tree trunks by the side of the canal and are crossing on them to the other side. Kalimali is there among them."

That is how we crossed the canal....

* The author, Alexander Peczorski, a Jewish Soviet prisoner of war, was one of the organizers of the uprising in the Sobibor camp on October 14, 1943.

Source: *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no.166. pp.356-358.