

## Evidence of Jewish Escapees From the Ninth Fort in Kovno on the Burning of the Bodies

Protocol, Kovno, December 26, 1943

We, the undersigned, a group of prisoners from the Ninth Fort, who escaped from there during the night from the 25th to the 26th of December of this year, consisting of: J.L. Vaslenitzki [Vasilenko], A. Diskant, A. Faitelson, M. Gelbtrunk, P. Krakinowski, M. Daitz, A. Wilenczuk, T. Pilownik, Gempel, Sh. Idelson, and A. Menaiski have put together this protocol regarding the following:

1. In the period of the years 1941-42, the area of the Ninth Fort was used by the German Command to carry out mass shootings.
2. In order to conceal this crime, the German Command, in the person of the Commander of the Kovno Gestapo, arranged for the re-opening of all the graves where the victims of the executions had been buried and set about burning the bodies.
3. In order to carry out this work the Gestapo collected 72 persons at the Ninth Fort at the end of October and beginning of November of this year. These were 34 Soviet prisoners of war, 14 Jewish partisans, 3 local Russians, caught while carrying out sabotage, 4 women -- 3 of them Jewish, one Polish - - and 17 Jews from the Kovno ghetto.
4. The work was organized in such a fashion that the surrounding population should not find out anything about it, and in fact that nobody should know what was being done in the area of the Ninth Fort. Notices were put up everywhere at a distance of 2 kms. forbidding closer approach under threat of execution. The working area of 2-3 acres was surrounded with a canvas (screen). None of the people who carried out the work was intended ever to leave the Fort alive. This is supported by the fact that one of the Jews from the ghetto, who was taken ill with appendicitis, was shot on November 5, and 7 of the prisoners of war -- older men and invalids - were shot on November 13 of this year. There then remained 64 persons for the work.

5. During the period of the work, i.e., from November 1 until December 25 (the day of the escape), 4½ graves were opened, each of them 100-120 meters long, 3 meters wide and 1½ meters deep. More than 12,000 bodies were taken out -- men, women, children. These bodies were piled up together, 300 at a time, to be burned. What was left after the burning (charcoal and bones) was ground down to powder in pits. This powder was then mixed with earth so that no trace of it should remain.

6. In order to prevent any escapes during work, the workers were linked together with chains. There were towers for machine-guns. The guards were armed with submachine-guns and pistols.

7. Among the 12,000 bodies burned there were about 7,000 Jews from Kovno....

8. The position of the bodies was proof that groups of people were driven into the graves and shot afterwards. The result was that many were buried when they were only wounded or even had not been wounded at all by the bullets.

9. On the day of escape there were many graves still unopened. The Gestapo Commanders had figured that they would finish the work by April 1, 1944....

Eleven signatures

**Source: Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio (Eds.), *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. 213, pp. 473-475.**