

## The Fate of Jewish Prisoners of War in the September 1939 Campaign\*

by

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This article is a first attempt to describe the fate of several tens of thousands of Jewish soldiers in the Polish Army, taken prisoner of war with the defeat of Poland in September 1939. This topic has not yet been explored by historians, with the exception of a few pages in Szymon Datner's book, "The Wehrmacht's Crimes Against Prisoners of War of the Regular Armies During the Second World War."<sup>1</sup>

There is very little documentary material available on the subject. The Polish Army, defeated in the Blitzkrieg, left no written records of its men taken prisoner, and the scanty files of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London hardly mention the fate of the Jewish prisoners of war. Soviet documents are still inaccessible. As for documentary evidence concerning German prisoner of war camps, the material relating to the first year of the Second World War, the object of our research, has been lost and only very few references appeared in the German documents introduced as evidence in the Nuremberg Trials. The main source of material is, therefore, the evidence and records of former prisoners of war, both Jews and Poles, either preserved in archives or published. Although it is impossible to analyze this kind of data with any statistical accuracy, it does enable us to ascertain basic facts and to describe the situation and fate of Jewish prisoners of war.

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<sup>1</sup> Szymon Datner, *Zbrodnie Wehrmachtu na jencach wojennych w II wojnie swiatowej*, Warsaw, 1961, pp. 201-211.

### *The Number of Polish Soldiers Captured by the Germans*

There are substantial differences of opinion concerning the number of Polish soldiers taken prisoner by the Germans in September 1939. A bulletin published by German military headquarters on September 24, 1939, that is prior to the surrender of Warsaw and the final collapse of the last vestiges of the Polish Army, puts the number of soldiers captured by that date at over 450,000.<sup>2</sup> A bulletin of October 6 mentions more than 700,000 prisoners of war.<sup>3</sup> In a speech on August 18, 1942, Frank, the Governor General, noted that there were still approximately 400,000 Polish prisoners of war from the General Government<sup>4</sup> in prisoner of war camps and forced labor camps in Germany. A classified survey prepared in 1941 by the research bureau of the Polish Government-in-Exile showed that 694,000 Polish military personnel, including some 30,000 officers, had been captured by the Germans.<sup>5</sup> This number is cited

by the German historian Kurt von Tippelskirch<sup>6</sup> and the Polish scholar Jan Bigo.<sup>7</sup>

There were, however, Polish scholars who disputed these numbers, claiming that they were exaggerated. The first was the military historian, General Mieczyslaw Norwid-Neugebauer,<sup>8</sup> who maintained that the number of Polish

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<sup>2</sup> *Der Feldzug in Polen*, Stuttgart, November 1939, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, Gerhard Huemmelden, *Chronik des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Frankfurt am Main, 1966, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniku Hansa Franka 1939-1945*, Vol. I, Warsaw, 1972, p. 512.

<sup>5</sup> The activity of the Occupation Authorities in Poland in the period 1.9.1939-1.11.1940; approved by Minister Kot, February 4, 1941, copy in Yad Vashem Archives (hereafter — YVA), M-2/187.

<sup>6</sup> Kurt von Tippelskirch, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, Bonn, 1956, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> *Nauczyciele w hitlerowskich obozach jencow podczas II wojny swiatowej*, Warsaw, 1967, pp. 9-10.

<sup>8</sup> Mieczyslaw Norwid-Neugebauer, *Kampania wrzesniowa w Polsce*, London, 1941, p. 160.

soldiers seized by the Germans was only 420,000. Witold Bieganski<sup>9</sup> regarded 400,000 as a more realistic number; this figure is supported by the noted Polish scholar of the occupation of Poland, Czeslaw Madajczyk.<sup>10</sup>

The proportion of Jews in the Polish Army in the September 1939 campaign ranged between eight and ten per cent; this indicates that the number of Jewish soldiers captured by the Germans was between 34,000 and 64,000. The latter figure seems to have been more accurate since the data published by the Representation of Polish Jewry cites a figure of 61,000.<sup>11</sup> The Germans treated all prisoners of war brutally in flagrant violation of the Geneva Convention, but their abuse of the Jewish prisoners of war was especially cruel.<sup>12</sup>

From the evidence of former prisoners of war it is impossible to discern any consistent standard of behavior on the part of German soldiers at the actual moment of surrender. In many cases the Germans acted fairly, while in others they exhibited great cruelty from the very first moment. Thus, for example, we find the following in one of the testimonies submitted to the underground archives of the Warsaw Ghetto (The Ringelblum Archives):

...My first encounter with the Germans did not in any way bear out the opinion I had of them. They treated us well; they even kept driving slowly so as not to overtake us. They talked to us in a friendly manner and complained about Poland's stubbornness (if we had agreed to yield Gdansk and that small part of Pomerania, we could have prevented the war).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Witold Bieganski, "Najnowsze dzieje Polski 1939-1945," in *Polscy, jency wojenni w Niemczech — Przyczynek do badan nad iloscia jencow*, Vol. 7, Warsaw, 1963, pp. 57-58.

<sup>10</sup>Czeslaw Madajczyk, *Polityka Trzeciej Rzeszy w okupowanej Polsce*, Vol. I, Warsaw, 1970, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup> *News Bulletin*, Representation of Polish Jewry, American Division, No. 4, October 1943, copy in YVA, M-2/567.

<sup>12</sup> From the summer of 1941 the Soviet POWs were also treated with cruelty and eventually most of them were murdered.

<sup>13</sup> Ringelblum Archives, copy in YVA, M-10/PH/11-2-2.

Nevertheless, there were many more cases in which prisoners of war, and Jews in particular, were treated harshly. The Germans often asked: "Are you a Jew?" Marian Nasielski states that it was his negative reply which saved his life. Those who answered in the affirmative were shot.<sup>14</sup> Joseph Zerkowicz gave a similar description:

We were formed into groups of five and marched along the road. We were warned that if anyone attempted to escape all five men in his group would be shot forthwith. Although none tried to get away the German guards still fired into the column of prisoners, just like that. We did what we could for the wounded and carried them along with us.<sup>15</sup>

*At the Transit Camp (Assembly Point)*

The German policy of terror against prisoners of war, and Jews in particular, was implemented fully already at the assembly points or transit-camps which were set up in factories, churches, prisons, occasionally in schools and most often out in the open, in stadiums or city squares. The segregation of Jews and the harsher attitude towards them began at this point. The separation, which continued at the permanent prisoner of war camps, was in compliance with the standing order issued to commanders of prisoner of war camps approved by the German Chief of Staff, Wilhelm Keitel, on February 16, 1939. This standing order was formulated within the context of the plans drawn up for the invasion of Poland; one of its principal sections set forth the necessity of segregating prisoners of war according to national and racial origin.<sup>16</sup>

The Ringelblum Archives give the following account of conditions at the assembly point sited in Siedlce jail:

At the prison we were treated with harsh cruelty. More than ten men were packed into cells intended for four or five. There was no regular distribution

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<sup>14</sup> Testimony of Marian Nasielski, YVA, 0-3/1184.

<sup>15</sup> Joseph Zerkowicz, "Milhama, Geto, Mahnot-Mavet ve-Hashmada," *Wieruszow, Sefer Yizkor* (Memorial Book), Tel Aviv, 1970, p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> Service Regulation for the Commandant of a "Main Prisoner of War Camp for Enlisted Men." Nuremberg Trial — Case XII, Document Reinecke, No. 62.

of food and there was not even enough water because the wells had dried up. Three days later they assembled all the inmates of the prison, about one thousand in all, in the courtyard, formed us into ranks and ordered 'Jews out.' This was the first instance of any distinction between Jews and Gentiles. It is hardly surprising that many were afraid to admit they were Jews and only thirty stepped forward (myself among them). Nothing bad happened to us — we remained at the prison and the others were sent on somewhere. We had been kept on, it transpired, to sweep out the cells and clean the latrines, which were in a filthy state. When I pointed out to the officer in charge that all I had was a spade no bigger than the palm of my hand he came over to me, pulled out his pistol and shouted: if you don't clean that up (the urine) with your hands I will shoot. I had no choice. I fortunately managed to evade the blow he aimed at me and got on with the job. We did this kind of work five or six days. During this time several groups of prisoners passed through the prison and I saw that the Germans did not treat them all in the same way. *Volksdeutsche* and Ukrainians were assigned the best cells, that is the largest, the Poles the poorer ones and the Jews had to make do with the corridors... The entire time we were in prison we quite literally starved. We were given some kind of soup perhaps three times and just once a slice of bread. One evening our group of 'sweepers' was attached to a party of about 2,000 men, surrounded by armed soldiers and despatched in the direction of Wegrowiec...

From Siedlce we walked all night — half dead from hunger and exhaustion — until noon the following day. Anyone who collapsed with fatigue in the ditch to rest a bit was immediately shot. That night I heard ten shots. About ten kilometers before Wegrowiec they stopped and let us rest. When the local farmers heard about the prisoners of war they brought bread and milk and shared it out among us; the Germans did not object. But after a while, when they saw that it was being done haphazardly, they impounded the food and announced that they would give it out themselves. So they ordered us to form a line and each one stepped forward to receive his ration. I stood in line too. When it was my turn one of the prisoners, from Poznan, told the German soldier that I was a Jew. That was enough for him. "Jew?" he asked me

roughly. I said I was. 'Für Juden gibt es kein Brot und Milch' (There's no bread and milk for Jews) he shouted and sent me away.

It was the same with the rest of the Jews. One day I hurt my foot badly; I began to limp and could barely keep up with the rest. The transport leader noticed this and told me to sit on one of the carts which accompanied us. I mounted the waggon, sat down and took my shoes off to ease the pain in my feet, which were covered in blood. Unfortunately, the German who had given out the bread saw this. He made me get off the cart, aimed his rifle at me and bellowed: 'Du kannst laufen, Jude.' (You can run, Jew.) He began pushing me towards those at the front, who were about 500 meters ahead. By making a supreme effort I managed to avoid his bayonet and, given no alternative, began to run. For more than ten kilometers my 'guard' gave me no peace, constantly threatening to shoot me, cutting my coat with his bayonet. When the German cavalry passed us he pushed me among the horses so that they should trample me. In this fashion, under incessant threat of death, I reached Wegrowiec. I was a broken man, I wanted to cry from pain... At Wegrowiec, when the Germans discovered a Jewish prisoner of war they made him stand in a ditch full of water for more than half an hour...<sup>17</sup>

David Leiser gives the following information about conditions in the transit camp which was established in the school at Krosniewice, in the Kutno region:

When we were transferred to the school we starved, because the only food we received apart from small rations of bread was watery soup. The Poles began secretly to barter their army gear — shoes, coats and blankets — for food with the civilian population. Afterwards they would turn to the Germans and point — look, that Jew has shoes and I haven't. Naturally the Germans ordered the Jew to remove his shoes and give them to the Pole. The same thing happened with blankets, coats and other items. Thus, within a few days we were left without shoes, coats or even uniforms. We slept on the floor, on a

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<sup>17</sup>Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*



thin layer of straw, without even a military blanket. The fleas attacked us immediately and we suffered less from hunger than from cold and vermin.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Berger was one of the thousands of soldiers who were taken captive on September 19 in the area between Sochaczew and Zyrardow, after the defeat at the Bzura River. He reports that immediately after the surrender the Germans began to group the prisoners according to nationality. A German officer addressed the 1,500 Jews there, accusing the Jewish people of wanting to conquer Berlin. Brutal treatment began forthwith. A large number of prisoners, both Jews and non-Jews, were driven to the concentration-point at Zyrardow, which had been set up in the open at the local stadium. They were kept there for ten days without food and managed to stay alive solely because the local inhabitants threw food over the fence. On September 24, the Day of Atonement, the Germans treated the Jews with particular brutality, forcing them to clean latrines with their bare hands. From Zyrardow the prisoners were taken to a permanent camp. They were packed together in sealed cattle-trucks and for the ten-day journey were not allowed to leave the cars even to relieve themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Shlomo Sztrajcher provides information about another assembly point at Zyrardow, in one of the factories. The Germans appointed Michal Mikulski, a staff officer of the 51st Infantry Regiment, head of the camp. He was told to divide the men according to national origin, but refused and declared that there were only Poles in the camp. Consequently, the Germans segregated the men themselves. Sztrajcher writes:

The German officer arrived and ordered a list of all the names to be drawn up according to halls. They summoned each man and questioned him. Not only did they ask: 'Are you a Jew?'; they also made everyone whose name did not sound Polish drop his trousers.

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<sup>18</sup> Testimony of David Leiser, YVA, 0-3/2841.

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Joseph Berger-Ezrahi, YVA, 0-3/447.

Some time later the Polish officer, Mikulski, arranged for the escape of several prisoners, both Jews and Poles. Shlomo Sztrajcher was one of them.<sup>20</sup>

There is further evidence about the savage treatment meted out to Jews in the transit camps. For example, Joseph Reznik writes about the camp at Radom,<sup>21</sup> Shlomo Gruber about the one at Sochaczew<sup>22</sup> and Yerachmiel-Szypacki about the assembly point at Lomza.<sup>23</sup> Some of the evidence also gives an account of the murder of prisoners of war. For example, Moshe Alsiewicz who was captured on September 28, tells of the murder of large numbers of prisoners of war at the assembly point at Zambrow; the Germans killed 250 of the 1,200 prisoners held there.<sup>24</sup>

### *Camps for Enlisted Personnel — Stalags*

The non-commissioned officers and men were transferred from the assembly points and transit camps to permanent prisoner of war camps called Stalags (an abbreviation of *Mannschaftsstelllager*). The prisoner of war camp was usually headed by a commander (*Lager-Kommandant*), a *Wehrmacht* officer generally with the rank of Colonel (*Obersf*). The commander had a fairly large staff, in which a special role was played by the intelligence officer (*Abwehroffizier*). Regular *Wehrmacht* units were assigned to guard duties and were organized in regional rifle battalions (*Landeschützenbataillone*). The prisoners of war who were sent to work outside the camp were guarded by auxiliary forces (*Hilfs-Wachmannschaften*), drawn from the civilian reserves, as well as by *Wehrmacht* personnel. These prisoners of war were formed into workunits (*Arbeitskommandos*), commanded by the Camp Commander. Only a part of these units were employed within the camp proper.<sup>25</sup>

Jewish enlisted men were sent in the main to the following camps:

- I A     Stalack — Eastern Prussia
- I B     Hohenstein — Eastern Prussia

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<sup>20</sup> Testimony of Shlomo Sztrajcher, YVA, 0-3/2118.

<sup>21</sup> Testimony of Joseph Reznik, YVA, 0-33/294.

<sup>22</sup> Testimony of Shlomo Gruber, YVA, 0-16/459.

<sup>23</sup> Testimony of Yerachmiel Szypacki, YVA, M-I/E-1581.

<sup>24</sup> Testimony of Moshe Alsiewicz, YVA, M-I/E-1434.

<sup>25</sup> Stanislaw Senft, Horst Wiecek, *Obozy jenieckie na obszarze Śląskiego Wehrmachtu 1939-1945*, Wrocław, 1972, pp. 13-14.



- II A Neu Brandenburg — Pomerania
- II B Hammerstein — Pomerania
- II D Stargard — Pomerania
- III A Luckenwalde — Berlin Region
- VI A Hamer — Westphalia
- VI C Rathorn — Westphalia
- VI D Dortmund — Westphalia
- VII A Moosburg — Bavaria
- Vin B Lamsdorf — Upper Silesia
- XI A Altengrabow — near Hanover
- XII A Limburg — Wiesbaden region
- XII B Frankenthal — Wiesbaden region
- XIII D Nuremberg
- XVII A Kaisersteinbruch — Vienna region
- XVII B Pernau/Wels — Vienna region
- XVII C Markt Pongau — Vienna region

Segregation was enforced in all these camps. The accommodation, rations, terror and heavy labor imposed on the Jewish prisoners of war were similar to those inflicted in German concentration camps.

### Accommodation

The vast majority of the Jewish prisoners of war spent the winter of 1939-40 in unheated tents, in conditions of severe overcrowding and without any sanitary facilities. In Stalag IA at Stablack the prisoners were initially left out in the open and only some time later transferred to tents — one hundred men to a tent — pitched on water-logged clay ground and constantly sinking into the mud.<sup>26</sup> Similar conditions prevailed at camp XVII C at Markt Pongau.<sup>27</sup> At Hamer all prisoners of war, Jews as well as Poles, were accommodated in tents.<sup>28</sup> In camp VII A at Moosburg and camp XI A at Altengrabow the pri-

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<sup>26</sup> Alsiewicz, *ibid.*; Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Aryeh-Leib Helfgot, "Iberlebungen fun a Veloner Krigsgefangenen," *Sefer Zikaron le-Kehillat Wielun*, Tel Aviv, 1971, pp. 380-384.

<sup>28</sup> Testimony of Abraham Obwarzanek, in *Kehillat Konin bi-Prihatah*

soners slept on the floor of the tent even when the frost was severe.<sup>29</sup> At camp II D at Stargard the tents were fitted with floor-boards and a little straw. The prisoners were issued with thin blankets which gave virtually no protection from the cold and damp.<sup>30</sup> At camp XVII A at Kaisersteinbruch the prisoners slept in tents on straw mattresses.<sup>31</sup> Conditions were not much better at the large VIII B camp, Lamsdorf, where approximately 5,000 Jewish prisoners of war were housed in barns, 700 or 800 to each barn, without any floor-covering whatsoever.<sup>32</sup>

### *Rations*

The prisoners were given very little food and were in a constant state of hunger. The calculations made by the research office of the Government-in-Exile in London indicated that daily caloric intake was between 2,200 and 2,400. The Polish prisoners of war received approximately the following daily rations: meat — 30 grams (1/6), bread — 350 grams (i), fresh vegetables — 150 grams (3/4), potatoes — 600 grams (1/2), fat — 35 grams (1/2) (the figures in parentheses denote the proportion of regular German military rations). The research office states: "The inadequate food rations [of the Polish prisoners of war — S.K.] provoke weight loss or bloating from hunger, and the watery soup causes stomach disorders [diarrhoea], infections of the bladder and scurvy."<sup>33</sup> The rations issued to the Jewish prisoners were far worse.

The following evidence, found in the Ringelblum Archives, reveals the conditions prevailing at the Stablack camp:

At four in the morning we were given a little coffee and some bread (between 250 and 350 grams) which was supposed to last the whole day; at noon we were given soup, usually cabbage soup, in which there sometimes floated a few grains of buckwheat of the poorest quality. For supper we were given

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*u-be-Hurbanah*, Tel Aviv, 1968, p. 579.

<sup>29</sup> Reznik, *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Testimony of Roman Fiszer, YVA, 0-3/2124.

<sup>31</sup> Testimony of Aryeh Helfgot, YVA, 0-3/2292.

<sup>32</sup> Testimony of Michal Finger, YVA, 0-16/25.

<sup>33</sup> See note 5, p. 212.

coffee again. In addition we were allocated meagre amounts of salami and jam.<sup>34</sup>

At the Lamsdorf camp one loaf of bread had to be shared by six or eight men. The prisoners drank ice-cold tea and once a day were given carrot soup.<sup>35</sup> At the Altengradow camp the Jews received 150 grams of bread and jam each day and were usually given cabbage soup for lunch.<sup>36</sup> The situation was worse at camp VI C at Rathorn, where a loaf of mouldy bread and half a jar of soup was issued as two days' rations for 5 men.<sup>37</sup> The Jewish prisoners of war received similar starvation rations at the Hamer camp.<sup>38</sup>

### *Cruelty to Prisoners*

Worse than the cold and hunger was the savage treatment meted out to the prisoners of war — unceasing persecution, brutality and torture.

"The prisoners of war in the camps staffed by privates and noncommissioned officers of the German Army are exposed to brutality according to the well-known training system. Beatings, atrocities and punishment exercises are a daily occurrence. This applies to Stalags I A, IB, II C, VIIC and XIII A."<sup>39</sup>

The Polish prisoners of war were allotted far superior living conditions and food rations, and they were sent as laborers to farms. There were fewer instances of cruelty towards them. The Jewish prisoners of war were not usually allowed to work on farms but were assigned to the hardest of labor on roads and construction sites. Evidence of this is given, amongst others, by Joseph Cynowiec:

This was Stalag VI C. The worst thing was that the Jews were already separated from the other prisoners of war, so that the special attitude towards

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<sup>34</sup>Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>Finger, *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Testimony of Pinkus Zyskind, YVA, 0-16/447.

<sup>37</sup>Testimony of Joseph Cynowiec, YVA, 0-3/3009.

<sup>38</sup>Obwarzanek, *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>See note 5, p. 212.

us was immediately set and the fact incessantly stressed that our situation was different from that of the other prisoners of war. For example, they sent the Poles in work-groups to the villages, to what they called 'commando'; there they lived in the homes of German peasants, worked, were virtually free men and received everything, while the Jews remained in the camp, closed in, tortured, perpetually hungry, doing endless heavy labor. After a while many collapsed and , the weaker ones broke completely.<sup>40</sup>

Zyskind has reported on the terrible conditions endured by the Jewish prisoners of war who were sent from the camp at Altengrabow to work in a sugar factory located in the Berlin area. They were beaten incessantly while they worked. Some time later they were transferred to Dessau where they built a sewage network, working twelve hours a day under unbearable conditions.<sup>41</sup>

At the Stablack camp prisoners were chosen daily for construction work outside the camp. They were beaten mercilessly on the way to the site. While at work they were guarded by German overseers (*Meister*), who treated them brutally and beat them on the head with heavy sticks. At this camp about ten or fifteen men died each day from exhaustion and beatings.<sup>42</sup>

Mikolaj Caban writes about the conditions at the Stargard camp in his memoirs:

It was at the beginning of December [1939]. They had just begun to build the camp, replacing the tents, in which we had lived at the beginning, with huts. The Polish prisoners of war were put on construction while the hardest work was done by the Jewish prisoners who were kept in total isolation in a special field.

A special field was also allocated for the Ukrainians and the Lithuanians, who were immediately accorded special treatment. Those who enlisted in the *Volksliste* were removed from the camp shortly afterwards. After the French surrender, Moroccans, Frenchmen and Africans were brought to the camp. At

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<sup>40</sup> Cynowiec, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Zyskind, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of Szymon Suzan, YVA, 0-16/331.

first each group was kept separated and was given differential treatment. It was very rare for a French or Polish prisoner to be beaten, the Moroccans were mistreated while the most barbarous treatment was reserved for the Jews with whom the Germans dealt terribly from the very beginning. This applied to Polish prisoners who were of Jewish origin as well as to Czech Jews and later to French Jews as well. When it grew cold they took away their coats, sweaters, warm underwear and blankets, and gave them one paper blanket instead. The terrible food, even worse than that issued to other prisoners, and the hard labor of unloading building-materials rapidly reduced them to a state of exhaustion. With the onset of cold weather they began to die. Every morning a cart would come to the field where the Jewish prisoners were held and those who had frozen to death — sometimes twenty from one tent — would be loaded onto it. When the cold intensified the cart came twice a day. The Jews were made to work at construction as long as the growing cold still permitted of this. Every morning they were forced to drill under German supervision until they had no strength left.<sup>43</sup>

The Jewish prisoners were also burdened by roll-calls, which were held several times during the day and were accompanied by beatings. We find the following evidence in one of the accounts:

The Germans held roll-calls almost every day, in order to count the Jews. I think that these roll-calls were even worse than the commander's abuse. They were usually held at five in the morning and since hardly any of us had shoes we were exposed to the danger of severe chill. Once there were several very sick men in my group, so I did my best to have them exempted from appearing, and in the end I succeeded. But on the day of the inspection the German commander suddenly became concerned and began to shout that people were missing; finally he sent soldiers and with cudgels and bayonets they drove the half-naked and barefoot men to the frozen square.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Mikotaj Caban, *Powrot z za rzeki Styks*, Warsaw, 1964, p. 84-86.

<sup>44</sup> Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*

Methods of terror were also employed while the prisoners were working. Michael Finger, a former prisoner at the Lams-dorf camp, writes: "The Jews were sent out to shovel snow and to work at the sugar factory, loading beets. Anyone who ate a sugar-beet was shot immediately."<sup>45</sup>

Conditions at the Insterburg camp in East Prussia were even more horrible, bordering on the sadistic; prisoners were tortured and beaten for no reason at all. There were days when several men died as a result of this treatment. Only seventy of the four hundred prisoners of war at this camp remained alive at the end of ten months.<sup>46</sup>

The position of the Jewish prisoners was made even more wretched by the aggressive behavior of some of the Polish prisoners, who organized pogroms in some of the camps, a phenomenon till then unprecedented. The pogroms, although instigated partly by the German officers were also an outcome of the antisemitic attitudes held by a large proportion of the Polish prisoners of war and of the indifference of the majority. The most serious outbreaks took place at camp I A at Stablack, the first during the process of segregation shortly after the prisoners were brought to the camp. It was described as follows:

We were all made to form ranks and one of the German soldiers, Apel by name, ordered in Polish: 'Jews, get out.' When we stepped out of the ranks he told us to surrender our shoes, coats, uniforms, etc. to the 'Aryans', 'or they would take them themselves.' This filled the Jews with despondency. Some of them tried tearing holes in their coats, so that no-one would want them; others, with the same object in mind, tried to exchange them for those of inferior quality. Someone came up to me and demanded my good boots, offering his light shoes in exchange. I did not hasten to conclude the deal, luckily for me, because I suddenly heard someone shout out behind me: 'I'd die rather than let you take the boots off him.' A Polish soldier I had known in Warsaw was standing behind me. This support stiffened my resistance; I did not give up my boots, thus saving myself many privations and illnesses.

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<sup>45</sup> Finger, *ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Testimony of Nathan Pesse, in *Sefer ha-Zikaron li-Kdoshei Biezun*, Tel Aviv, 1956, p. 53.



After this official robbery Jews were formed into groups and allocated a special tent area... it gradually grew colder and our fellow-prisoners would increasingly frequently demand that their gear be supplemented at the Jews' expense. Their forays were sporadic at first, but then became more frequent, eventually turning into a full-scale pogrom. Large bands broke into our tents taking not only warm clothing but also fountain pens, watches and other items.<sup>47</sup>

There was another riot on the Day of Atonement. This time the Jewish prisoners organized their defence. Possibly as a result of this the German guards intervened and opened fire from the watchtowers, killing one Jew. After that the Jewish prisoners of war mounted regular guards in front of each tent in an attempt to protect themselves from the sudden attacks of their former comrades-in-arms, who outnumbered them by far.<sup>48</sup>

The fact that Jewish prisoners were not permitted to hold any position within the camp, other than command of a Jewish company, led to serious difficulties for them. The other tasks were frequently assigned to avowed antisemites, who exploited every opportunity to abuse the Jews. Several non-commissioned officers who were in charge of the field kitchen and were responsible for the distribution of food made themselves conspicuous in this regard. This is evident from the following description:

A few words about the distribution of food to Jews. The commandant of the camp was a Polish soldier who saw that he could make a profit for himself by exploiting our situation. Through intimidation, threats and beatings he induced some of our number to attempt to ingratiate themselves by offering him gifts or selling him objects of value at ridiculous prices. Loaves of bread at eight marks a kilogram, as well as tobacco were offered for sale in the Jewish tents; these items were stolen by the commandant from the allocations for the Jewish tents... the Polish cooks could with impunity give the Jews the worst

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<sup>47</sup>Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>Testimony of Mendel Lipszyc, YVA, M-I/E-244; Alsiewicz, *ibid.*

food as well as the watery soup at the top of the pot, leaving the more nourishing residue for their own people.<sup>49</sup>

At camp II A, Neu Brandenburg, the German commander issued instructions as early as October 1939 to the effect that the 'Aryan' prisoners were entitled to the uniforms and personal effects of the Jewish prisoners. Chaim Joseph Kaplan writes of this:

We did not have to wait very long. The men who had been comrades-in-arms the day before immediately fell upon their friends, tumbling them to the ground and tearing off their coats, uniforms, shoes and hats without even allowing them time to remove them themselves.<sup>50</sup>

Those men from whom the last remnants of army uniform had been stolen were assigned separate tents; half-naked and barefoot they were sent to work and many of them froze to death.

#### *The Release of Prisoners of War from German-Occupied Territories*

At the end of 1939 the first prisoners of war, residents of the German-occupied areas, were released. The prisoners were despatched under terrible conditions. They were usually provided with no dry rations whatsoever and were given food at the stations after two or three days' travel. These rations were smaller than those they had received at the camps, and usually amounted to one warm ration per day (beetroot soup without meat or fat). The prisoners were transported in unheated freight trucks, with temperatures below 20° centigrade.<sup>51</sup>

The release of the prisoners extended over a period of several months, and many were freed only in March 1940. In Stalag I A, Stalack, for example, a selection was held on March 22, and only then were the prisoners from the conquered areas released.<sup>52</sup> The overall number of prisoners of war who were

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<sup>49</sup> Ringelblum Archives, *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> YVA, 0-3/3504.

<sup>51</sup> See note 5, p. 212.

<sup>52</sup> Lipszyc, *ibid.*

released has been estimated at somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000. They were in a state of total exhaustion, some were wounded or had frozen limbs and many had contracted tuberculosis at the prisoner of war camps.<sup>53</sup>

The principal assembly points for released prisoners of war were Warsaw and some of the large provincial towns. The released men were looked after by the Jewish population and the *Judenrate*; considerable aid was also provided by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. In one of the reports on the work of the Joint between November 1939 and October 1940, we find the following:

During the winter months of last year the Joint was suddenly confronted with a grave task, saving the many thousands of released prisoners of war who had reached Warsaw and the other large cities in a terrible state. Immediate action was required in order to extend assistance and provide temporary accommodation, clothing and funds for their journey home. During the month of February alone the center set up especially to serve the needs of the prisoners of war (34, Swietojska St.) provided 4,201 meals, 502 beds and clothing for 259 men. During the past few months the number of men seeking aid at this center has been even greater.<sup>54</sup>

After receiving help from the Joint or the *Judenrat*, the prisoners of war returned to their families in the ghettos, eventually sharing the fate which befell the Jewish population of conquered Poland.

## The Annihilation of the Prisoners of War from the Territories Annexed by the U.S.S.R.

The fate which befell the prisoners of war from the territories occupied by the Red Army was a different one. The overall number of prisoners in this

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<sup>53</sup>See note 5, p. 212.

<sup>54</sup> Ringelblum Archives, M-10/BH/17-1-1.

category was approximately 20,000. When Soviet citizenship was conferred on all residents of these territories, the status of those prisoners of war who had been previously captured by the Germans became problematic. Their civilian relatives had become Soviet citizens whereas they were regarded as Polish soldiers while in prison camp. There can be little doubt that Soviet-German talks were held on this point, and it is almost certain that a decision was reached concerning the exchange of prisoners. Be that as it may, a certain number of prisoners drawn from the Polish Army, both Jews and Poles, were transferred to the U.S.S.R. These prisoners of war were released by the Soviet authorities soon afterwards, and returned to their homes. Some of them were later arrested and sent to camps.

Of interest is the story of Zeev Winawer, who was one of the few who were exchanged for Polish soldiers of German origin (*Volksdeutsche*) taken captive by the Red Army. Winawer served as an officer in the 33rd infantry battalion in 1939. He was taken prisoner and held at Magdeburg camp. In March 1940 with the exchange of prisoners of war by Germany and the U.S.S.R., he reached Bialystok. Shortly afterwards he was falsely accused of espionage, was arrested, tortured and condemned to death. He appealed, and his sentence was commuted to a spell at the Vorkuta camp. Released, by the terms of the Sikorski-Stalin agreement, he was soon inducted into the Red Army. He fought in the battle of Stalingrad as a company commander. After some time he was transferred to the Polish Army and took part in the conquest of Berlin.<sup>55</sup>

It is not known when the decision was made in Germany to proceed with the physical destruction of Jewish prisoners of war originating from the areas annexed by the U.S.S.R. The mass murder of these prisoners began as early as December 1939, when 200 of them from the first transport brought under S.S. escort from the prisoner of war camps in Germany to the border-station at Wlodawa, met their death. During the journey, which took three weeks, prisoners died of hunger while many others froze to death or sustained frozen limbs. In the forest between the stations of Wlodawa and Sobibor the

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<sup>55</sup>Testimony of Zeev Winawer, YVA, 0-3/1381.

prisoners were ordered out of the carriages, taking the dead with them. After the men had been led into the forest the S.S. soldiers opened fire from automatic weapons. The prisoners of war tried to run away, but only a few of them succeeded. 120 corpses were left there. The Wlodawa *Judenrat* obtained permission from the German authorities, in return for payment, to remove the wounded and bury the dead in the Jewish cemetery of Wlodawa. The local rabbi, Mendel Morgenstern, made a list of names and attempted to identify each body by means of documents found beside it.<sup>56</sup>

In January 1940 an additional transport of 880 prisoners of war was brought to Lublin. On January 14, the march of 120 kilometers was begun via Lubartow and Parczew to Biala Podlaska. The prisoners were told that they were being taken to the Soviet border, where they would be handed over to the Russians. The group was escorted by close to one hundred S.S. cavalymen armed with machineguns. Just before Lubartow the escort opened fire, killing many of the prisoners. That night the prisoners slept in an abandoned stable and in the local synagogue. Next day they were made to walk towards Parczew, and were shot at once again. Only 400 of the 880 prisoners who had set out from Lublin reached Parczew. The Jewish population there tried to organize help for them, as is reported by one of the survivors, Arieh Helfgot:

When our death march approached Parczew a delegation of Jews came out to meet us in order to conduct negotiations with our murderers. We were astonished at their courage, as they could quite easily have died together with us. They knew full well that they were endangering themselves. The entire neighborhood knew about our fate, yet they nevertheless regarded it as their duty to save whomever they could...<sup>57</sup>

Helfgot relates that the Jews of Parczew gave the S.S. men money in return for permission to provide the prisoners with food, including hot meals. During the night they were locked in the synagogue, from which the Jews of Parczew succeeded in helping about forty prisoners to escape; these were given

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<sup>56</sup>Anonymous testimony. *The History of Wlodawa Jews in the Time of the Nazi Occupation*, YVA, 0-33/49.

<sup>57</sup>Testimony of Aryeh Helfgot, YVA, 0-3/2181.

civilian clothing and were concealed in the homes of some Jews. After leaving Parczew the Germans again opened fire, killing another 116 men, who were buried in the Jewish cemetery. Only a handful reached Biala Podlaska, where they were interned in a camp and released in the middle of 1940.<sup>58</sup>

In January 1941 about one thousand prisoners of war were transferred from camps in Germany to the new camp for forced Jewish labor (*Judenlager*) which had been established at Biala Podlaska and which was under the control of the S.S. The prisoners, who were convinced that they were going to the U.S.S.R. within the terms of the agreement on the exchange of population, were met by the S.S. unit, which beat and killed many of them immediately upon their arrival. In the camp the prisoners were subjected to a regime of suppression and torture, suffering in particular from the cruelty of the Ukrainian guards, who served as auxiliaries to the S.S. Because of the unsanitary conditions all the inhabitants very soon became infested with lice and there was an epidemic of typhus. Within three months more than 200 prisoners had died as a result. Limited help in the form of medicines and medical advice was extended by the *Judenrat* of Biala Podlaska. The local Jews also managed to organize the escape of a number of prisoners.

On May 15, 1941 the camp at Biala Podlaska was closed down and the prisoners transferred to a new camp at Konskowola. When the prisoners were unloaded at the camp entrance it was discovered that four men had escaped from one of the wagons. The Germans tortured the remaining forty-one prisoners and twelve of them were murdered on the spot. In this camp where they remained until May 1942 the prisoners worked on building a road. The survivors were transferred to the camp at Budzyn and suffered the same fate as the other Jews at the camp. When Budzyn was closed down, in the spring of 1944, the few remaining prisoners were transferred to camps at Wieliczka, Plaszow, Gross-Rosen and Berlitz, and only a few remained alive.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Testimonies of Nachum Perelman, YVA, 0-3/1844; Helfgot, *ibid.*; Joseph Grosfeld, YVA, 0-33/53.

<sup>59</sup> Testimonies in YVA: Alsiewicz; Szypacki; Suzan; Izak Reznik, 0-16/382. Testimony of Berl Goldberg, in *Pinkas Zetel* (Memorial Book), Tel Aviv, 1957, p. 439.



In Lublin a large camp was established at 7 Lipowa Street, where approximately 3,500 prisoners were interned for an extended period. A large contingent, numbering 1,357 men, reached it in February 1940, with an additional group of 1,810 arriving in March. Smaller groups were channelled there throughout the year. The prisoners of war were looked after by the *Judenrat* of Lublin, which established for this purpose a "Special Committee for Helping the Prisoners of War and the Refugees," headed by Moshe Eisenberg and Meir Rotbaum.<sup>60</sup> There was even extensive underground activity on the part of the resistance organization, led by Roman Fiszer. About four hundred prisoners escaped from the camp but most of them were recaptured and executed. Approximately one hundred prisoners managed to escape and join the partisans, fighting for almost two years with the Jewish units which operated in the Lublin region. The remaining prisoners were removed from the camp on November 3, 1943 and were shot in front of the crematoria at Majdanek, in the operation dubbed *Erntefest*, designed to destroy the Jewish labor camps.<sup>61</sup>

### Officers' Camps — Oflager

It is difficult to estimate the number of Jewish officers captured by the Germans. The number does not seem to exceed one thousand since the percentage of Jewish officers in the Polish army was far lower than that of other ranks.

The changing attitude of the Germans to the prisoners of war can be learned from the evidence given by former prisoners. Samuel Orłowski, for example, writes of the fair treatment he received upon being taken prisoner when wounded.<sup>62</sup> Others, however, report on the methods of terror which were employed against them from the moment they were taken captive by the Germans. The witnesses describe different attitudes during the first part of their internment at the prisoner of war camp. Sohn-Sonecki recounts that both

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<sup>60</sup>The *Judenrat* in Lublin, an account of its activity from 1.9.1939-31.8.1940.  
YVA, 0-6/9.

<sup>61</sup>For details see Shmuel Krakowski, *Lehimah Yehudit be-Polin Neced ha-Nazim 1942-1944*, Tel Aviv, 1977, pp. 80-95, 296-308.

<sup>62</sup>Testimony of Prof. Samuel Orłowski, YVA, 0-3/2936.

Jewish and Polish officers were made to run naked and barefoot in a temperature of -6°C. at the Kaisersteinbruch camp near Vienna. As a result many of them fell ill and some died as was the case of Feldblum, a captured officer who died of pneumonia.<sup>63</sup> Henryk Bleder, on the other hand, relates that captured officers, whether Poles or Jews, were treated fairly during the initial period at camp 742, Wiessenhen.<sup>64</sup>

During the first half of 1940 some of the Jewish officers were released and sent to their homes in German-occupied territory. Most of the officers, however, were held in the camps,<sup>65</sup> and already in December 1939 rolls were drawn up of the Jews, in conformity with the Nuremberg Laws. Many converts appeared on the lists. The Polish officers were totally indifferent. Jacob Lewitin describes this attitude: "I expected the Polish officers to protest, but the reverse occurred. The Poles informed on the Jewish officers who attempted to conceal their Jewishness from the Germans. This influenced me to try to escape from the camp."<sup>66</sup> After escaping he managed to reach Russian-conquered territory and subsequently joined the Polish army raised in the U.S.S.R., where he served as a pilot in the Warsaw Air Regiment.

During 1940 selections were held at all the Polish officers prisoner camps and the Jews were taken to the transit camp at Hammerstein. After a brief internment at this camp they were sent on to other camps, and often re-transferred in a procedure known as 'Preparation for the March,' apparently with the object of assembling them in one spot. The Germans eventually halted this procedure and after the autumn of 1940 the Jewish officers remained at, various permanent camps for captured officers.<sup>67</sup>

In the absence of German documentation it is impossible to ascertain precisely why the commanders of the prisoner of war camps stopped assembling the Jewish officers. There can, however, be no doubt that a

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<sup>63</sup> Jozef Sohn-Sonecki, *Bylem jencem Wehrmachtu*, Warsaw, 1956, p. 81.

<sup>64</sup> Testimony of Zvi Menachemi (Henryk Bleder), YVA, 0-3/2934.

<sup>65</sup> Testimony of David Kindler, YVA, 0-3/2560.

<sup>66</sup> Testimony of Jacob Lewitin, YVA, 0-3/1856.

<sup>67</sup> W. Kowalczyk, S. Kotarski, *et al.*, *Nauczyciele w hitlerowskich obozach jericow podczas 11 wojny swiatowej*, Warsaw, 1967, p. 29; Testimony of Marian Palenkier, YVA, 0-3/1287.

decision was taken at a certain level that the fate of the officers would not be the same as that of the enlisted men. Most of the officers were sent to officers' camps at Waldenberg, Dorsten and Doessel. Ghettos were established in these camps by setting aside one hut or part of a hut for the Jews. Thus the situation of the Jews was considerably worse than that of the other officers. The following report about the camp at Dorsten was written by Sohn-Sonecki:

The worst hut, which had until then served as a workshop, was cleared out and prepared for the officers of Jewish origin. It had no sanitary arrangements or water.<sup>68</sup> The doctors among the Jewish officers were forbidden to work in the sick ward of the camp.<sup>69</sup>

The Jews sustained severe psychological trauma from the cruelty of many of their former comrades-in-arms, who were influenced by antisemitic groups and by the Radical Nationalist Camp (*Oboz Narodowo-Radykalny — O.N.R.*) in particular. Here is the evidence of Marian Palenkier:

The Jewish officers returned to the Waldenberg camp approximately three months after its establishment. The self-governing body of the Polish officers had already been set up under the aegis of the *Abwehr*. The camp was relatively large, holding 7,000 prisoners of war. Unfortunately the attitude of the Polish officers towards the Jews was negative and even hostile. There were very few exceptions. I knew of only a handful of cases in which Polish officers evinced friendship towards Jews. The self-governing body and the mass of prisoners were uncompromising in their treatment of their Jewish comrades.<sup>70</sup>

The Polish officer Jozef Bohatkiewicz has also left evidence concerning the influence exerted by the ONR on the Polish prisoners at the Waldenberg camp: "The ONR organization spread antisemitism and even attempted to

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<sup>68</sup>Sohn-Sonecki, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 122.

<sup>70</sup> Palenkier, *ibid.*

boycott anyone who maintained close relations with the Jews, who were held by the Germans in a special hut."<sup>71</sup>

This is supported by another Polish officer, Col. Jan Rzepecki:

In the political sphere the ONR was notable for its energy and vociferousness, exerting considerable influence over the younger reserve officers and the men of the regular army. The Germans spread their racist theories for the sole purpose of concentrating the officers of Jewish origin in half of one hut, but our local fascists allowed themselves to mock the Jews, engage in fights with them and even treat them as outcasts.<sup>72</sup>

One of the principal instigators of this boycott and of the anti-Semitic activities at the Waldenberg camp was the well-known Polish archaeologist and Egyptologist, Professor Kazimierz Michalowski. One of the most vehement opponents of this attitude was the camp's elder Col. Szalewicz.<sup>73</sup>

Sohn-Sonecki writes as follows about the situation in the officers' camp at Dorsten:

We have to be very careful in expressing our opinion since there are traitors in the camp. These spies are registered as *Volksdeutsche* and act as informers; they catch hold of anything we say inadvertently.

These people began their antisemitic incitement which steadily grew in strength, falling on particularly fertile ground among the young officers from the Posen and Pomerania areas. The group of 'reporters' who were employed in the German office also belonged to this group..The *Endecja*\* and 'Ozon'\*\* traditions contributed to the Nazi Influence and prepared the ground for the dissemination of antisemitic propaganda. One day in June Jews and Poles of

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<sup>71</sup> Jozef Bohatkiewicz, *Oflag II C Waldenberg*, Warsaw, 1971, p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> Jan Rzepecki, *Wspomnienia i przyczynki historyczne*, Warsaw, 1956, pp. 300-301.

<sup>73</sup> Raphael Loc, *Ba-Deyyota ha-Shlishit*, Tel Aviv, 1976, pp. 65, 79.

\* *Narodowa Demokracja* — ND; The Right-Wing National Democratic Party of an extreme antisemitic character.

\*\* *Oboz Zjednoczenia Narodowego* — O.Z.N.; "The Camp of National Unity."

Jewish origin, even those who were second or third-generation converts, were ordered to report at headquarters the next day. Anyone who disobeyed the order would be severely punished. The Jewish officers, as well as those who had long since abandoned all links with their Jewish origin and had suddenly become Jews again as a result of the draconian Nazi laws, were filled with dread. We did not know if this order had been promulgated on the initiative of the Poles or if the Germans were behind it.<sup>74</sup>

It was not considered fitting for Stanislaw Mond, the only general of Jewish origin, to be housed with the Jews, but neither could he remain with the Polish generals, so he was given a room of his own. Izak Sprecher writes: "There, in the camp, he felt Jewish and visited us Jews more than the Poles."<sup>75</sup> In a letter he sent to a member of the Polish National Council in Exile, Ignacy Schwarzbart, on May 24, 1945, shortly after his release from the camp, General Mond writes: "In captivity I was subjected to hell on earth, both by the Germans and by my comrades (because of my non-Aryan origin)."<sup>76</sup>

Not all the Polish officers were influenced by antisemitic groups. After describing various antisemitic phenomena at the Waldenberg camp, Rafael Loc concludes:

I fear that I have misled the reader in giving a general picture which portrays our prisoner of war camp as being totally riddled with antisemitism, superstition and mysterious beliefs.

There was of course no lack of antisemitism and this depressed us, particularly given the circumstances of place and time. On the other hand, there were occasional instances when Polish officers expressed sincere support for the isolated group of Jews and even established warm bonds of friendship with some of us...<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>Sohn-Sonecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>75</sup>Testimony of Izak Sprecher, YVA, 0-3/820.

<sup>76</sup>YVA, M-2/117.

<sup>77</sup>Loc, *ibid.*, p. 77.

Loc goes on to cite several examples of positive relations between Polish officers and their Jewish comrades.<sup>78</sup>

In rare cases Jewish officers remained outside the ghetto thanks to the friendly attitude of some of the Polish officers, who helped them to conceal their origin from the camp authorities. For example, the Jewish officer noted above, Marian Palenkier, was one of those few Jews in the Waldenberg camp who remained outside the ghetto, purely on account of the help he received from his friend, Captain Sykstus Guzy.<sup>79</sup>

The lot of the captured officers was eased somewhat by the parcels they received from the International Red Cross and by the fact that they were paid in camp currency, for which they could make purchases at the canteen.<sup>80</sup> This was not the case at the enlisted men's camps.

A significant element in the life of the prison camp was the cultural activities and study program which included courses in various academic and artistic spheres. Rafael Loc established a Hebrew course at the Waldenberg camp, which was attended by several Polish officers as well. Public prayers were organized in various camps on Jewish festivals.<sup>81</sup>

During the first few years, when there were still ghettos in occupied Poland, the officers could maintain contact with their families through letters, and in some ghettos the *Judenrate* tried to help the families. Joseph Rode, a senior official in the Order Service, writes about help of this nature in the Warsaw ghetto:

The families — usually they wives — of prisoners of war registered with the Jewish community authorities; they were cared for by the Department for Public Assistance (especially by one lady, Dr. Prager, who dealt exclusively with these matters), which gave them small sums of money and occasionally obtained grants for them. About two hundred wives (some with children) or

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 77-84.

<sup>79</sup> Palenkier, *ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Sprecher, *ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> Raphael Loc, "Katzin Yehudi-Polani ba-Shevi ha-Nazi," in *Ydkut-Moreshet*, 4, July 1965, pp. 88-92; Sprecher, *ibid.*



mothers of officers were registered. Jewish N.C.O.'s and enlisted men in the Polish Army were released by the Germans during 1940.<sup>82</sup>

In the Warsaw Ghetto an attempt was made to save the families of captured officers from being sent to Treblinka in the summer of 1942, as reported by Rode:

Prisoners sent typewritten declarations as early as the first few months, stating their name, military rank, camp serial number and definition of the camp. At the bottom of the page was a quotation from the order signed by Goring, guaranteeing the life and property, in all the occupied countries, of the families of soldiers captured by the Germans. The order related primarily to exempting those concerned from forced labor, confiscation of property and evacuation (*Aussiedlung*). When the deportation began they applied to the offices of the Managing Service asking what they should do and whether they would be exempt from evacuation. Karl Brandt [head of the Jewish section of the Gestapo in Warsaw — S.K.], who dealt with the matter, instructed that exemption notices be immediately issued to these people. The Social Assistance Department of the Jewish community sent detailed lists of wives, parents and children, taking advantage of the opportunity to include the names of the families of prisoners of war in Russia. Thus, between 600 and 800 further certificates of exemption were issued; the recipients returned to their homes with the magic rubber stamp, fully believing that Goring's order would be obeyed by all the German authorities, even by the Security Police at the time of evacuation.<sup>83</sup>

The certificates of exemption were of course not honored by the Germans and the families of captured officers perished in the gas chambers together with the other inhabitants of the ghettos. News of the liquidation of the ghettos reached the prisoner of war camps, plunging the Jewish officers into despair. There was also a serious threat that the Germans would kill the Jewish

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<sup>82</sup> Memories of Joseph Rode, YVA, 0-6/102, pp. 135-136.  
<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*

officers being held prisoner. Rafael Loc managed to inform the free world and the International Red Cross of the danger which threatened them. Thanks to the aid extended by the Polish officer, Commander Bogdan Mankowski, letters reached Ignacy Schwarzbart and Moshe Shertok (Sharett) calling for intervention. It is, however, difficult to assess the extent to which the intervention of these personalities with the International Red Cross did in fact evoke any measure of concern with the fate of the Jewish Polish Army officers held prisoner.<sup>84</sup>

The relatively stable situation of the prisoners of war in the camps deteriorated in the closing months of the war, when the Germans transferred the officers' camps to the interior of the country in the wake of the Allied advance towards the German frontiers. The evacuation was implemented in the same way as the death marches from the concentration camps; the prisoners were forced to march for hundreds of kilometers, they were starved and beaten and the weak and sick who could not keep up with the others were shot. Thus, for example, evacuation of the camp at Lamsdorf began on January 22, and the prisoners were forced to march through Silesia, Thuringia and the Hessen region, where their journey ended on March 10, 1945.<sup>85</sup> The evacuation of the camp at Waldenberg began on January 24, 1945. Some of the prisoners of war were liberated by the Red Army that same month, while the rest were transferred from one camp to another, under terrible conditions, until the surrender of the Third Reich.<sup>86</sup>

After Germany's surrender lists, were drawn up of the, Jewish officers liberated in the camps.

Oflag VI B Dorsten — 93

Oflag VI C Doessel — 44

Oflag IX C Molsdorf (near Erfurt) — 8

Oflag X C Bad Schwartan (near Liibeck) — 5

Oflag VI B — 4 for Air Force

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<sup>84</sup> Ba-Deyyota ha-Shlishit, p. 94-99.

<sup>85</sup> Lists of POWs, YVA, M-2/116.

<sup>86</sup> Palenkier, *ibid.*; Ortowski, *ibid.*

These figures are not complete because some of the prisoners of war left the camps immediately after the liberation;<sup>87</sup> their number is not known. Similarly, no estimate can be made of how many of the captured officers died as a result of Nazi barbarity during the evacuation.

## Detention Camps in Hungary

The remnants of the Polish units that were defeated in the Lwow area attempted to reach the Hungarian border, some of them even managing to cross into Subcarpathian Ruthenia. On arriving they surrendered their arms and were interned by the Hungarians. The evidence available shows that the number of Jews among the internees amounted to between 150 and 180 officers and almost 250 enlisted men.<sup>88</sup>

The Jews were kept together with the Poles until 1941. In August 1941 the Hungarians separated the two groups in the detention camps, according to the Nuremberg Laws. On August 21 and 22 the Jews were transferred to Vamosmikola, where a special camp was erected for them.

Although the command cadre at Vamosmikola was Hungarian, the prisoners also had their own administration with Captains Mandelbaum, Rochman and Templer as camp elder each for a fixed term. Until the spring of 1944 the imprisoned Jewish soldiers were treated fairly and were not subjected to special discrimination, apart from certain restrictions on their freedom of movement outside the camp; only rarely were Jews given permission to walk for several hours in the village. The Poles, however, were not subjected to this kind of restriction. The Jewish soldiers could not accept this form of discrimination and sought ways of making it known to the free world. The officer Henryk Reichman managed to send a letter to Schwarzbart, who informed Polish Minister of the Interior Banaczyk of this issue in a letter dated November 6, 1943. Schwarzbart wrote, *inter alia*:

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<sup>87</sup>YVA, M-2/116.

<sup>88</sup>Testimonies in YVA: Benjamin Taustein, 0-16/126; Roman Stil, 0-3/1402; Michael Baldinger, 0-3/2275; Henryk Reichman, M-2/435.

I received a letter dated August 25, 1943 from Dr. Henryk Reichman, an officer of the Polish Army, now at the Vamosmikola camp. He writes: 'Do everything that is in your power to destroy the shameful ghetto camp organized in line with Nazi beliefs — unfortunately, with some cooperation from individuals who are our countrymen — in which we have been confined for the last two years, isolated from the outside world.'<sup>89</sup>

The conditions in which the Jewish prisoners were held improved at the end of 1943 when Col. Utassy was appointed Hungarian camp commander, replacing Col. Bello. Utassy granted the Jewish soldiers greater freedom and took steps to eliminate the separate camp. Large consignments of Polish prisoners of war were brought to Vamosmikola camp, which became heterogeneous in its composition. A Polish officer, Lt.-Col. Florek, whose attitude towards the Jews was humane, was appointed the elder of the camp. Utassy's successor as commander of the camp was Col. Bela Tuchanyi, who also evinced a positive attitude towards the Jews.

The situation deteriorated with the German invasion of Hungary on March 19, 1944. Polish officers were no longer sent to the camp at Vamosmikola, nor were further exit permits issued. Matters grew even worse when Horthy was deposed and his place was taken by Szalasi.

The new Hungarian camp commander forbade Jews to approach the Poles or even speak to them. Two separate camps were established at Vamosmikola for Jews and Poles. Jewish refugees, who had made their way from occupied Poland by way of Slovakia, were transferred to the Jewish camp. Until then the camp had come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of War; it was now transferred to the sphere of the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior.

The evacuation of Vamosmikola camp, which turned into a death march, began on November 19, 1944. The prisoners were first forced to march to Komarom and from there were transferred to a nearby transit camp. Shortly afterwards the march to Germany began. It is not known how many of the evacuees died on the way. The officer Oskar Fiszer, from Drohobycz, was unable to cope with the arduousness of the death march and took poison.

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<sup>89</sup> YVA, M-2/72.

Those who were left alive were scattered throughout the prisoner of war camps at Gensgahen, Kaisersteinbruch and Luckenwalde. The latter took in the largest group of prisoners, 44 officers, who were later liberated by the Russians. Among those liberated were the Major Emmanuel Weinberg, Captains Stanislaw Gorowski, Samuel Goldberg, Ignacy Penzias, Moshe Rabach, Abraham Spielrein, Isidor Templer and Mark Trau as well as 36 N.C.O.'s.<sup>90</sup>

There is no data concerning the number of prisoners saved in other camps and those who were murdered or died as a result of the evacuation.

### Detention Camps in Lithuania

About 14,000 Polish soldiers crossed the border into Lithuania, where they surrendered their arms and were interned by the Lithuanians. The Polish historian Piotr Lossowski writes of the humane attitude of the Lithuanian authorities towards the interned Polish soldiers and their desire to ease their lot.<sup>91</sup> Baruch Madanski, on the other hand, mentions the hostile attitude of the Lithuanian soldiers to the Jews.<sup>92</sup> Be that as it may, the Lithuanians did not institute racial segregation and the conditions under which the Jews were held did not differ significantly from those of their Polish comrades-in-arms. The Lithuanian Government was interested in emptying the camps as rapidly as possible, and the gradual release of prisoners, which continued until the summer of 1940, began almost immediately.<sup>93</sup>

### The Soviet Captivity

The Red Army entered the former eastern territories of Poland and according to Polish statistics<sup>94</sup> took approximately 250,000 soldiers captive, including

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<sup>90</sup>Report on Jews in the Polish Army, YVA, M-2/136; Correspondence with survivors, YVA, M-2/421.

<sup>91</sup> Piotr Lossowski, "Internowanie żołnierzy polskich na Litwie w latach 1939-1940," in *Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny*, No. 4, Warsaw, 1971, pp. 59-77.

<sup>92</sup>Testimony of Baruch Madanski, YVA, M-I/E-1792.

<sup>93</sup>See note 91.

<sup>94</sup> Facts and Documents concerning Polish Prisoners of War Captured by U.S.S.R. during the 1939 Campaign, February 1946, London, p. 15 (hereafter — Facts and Documents).

about 10,000 officers. It can be assumed that there were between 20,000 and 25,000 Jews among these prisoners of war.

In many places the Russians released the captured soldiers and encouraged them to return to their homes. But very soon— apparently on the strength of new orders — they stopped this procedure and Soviet patrols even re-captured soldiers who had been released and were making their way home.<sup>95</sup>

The Russians gave a few prisoners, both Jews and Poles, to the Germans, almost certainly in exchange for Ukrainian and Byelorussian prisoners.<sup>96</sup>

The mass of enlisted men was initially directed to the hundreds of transit camps which were set up immediately in what had formerly been Eastern Poland as well as in the Ukraine and in Byelorussia. Conditions in these camps were very bad. The prisoners were crowded into huts without any sanitary facilities or into churches and monasteries, where they slept on the floor and received very little food.<sup>97</sup> One of the largest transit camps was Shepetovka, containing approximately 14,000 prisoners. The rations at this camp consisted of 200 grams of bread per day and a little soup; these were distributed in a manner that forced the men to stand in queues for hours.

From the transit camps the prisoners were sent to forced labor camps, primarily in the far north, to the Komi peninsula and the mines in the Donbas region. The prisoners of war endured the same conditions there as did the Soviet prisoners who had been sentenced to hard labor. The food ration was better than it had been in the transit camps (in some camps the daily ration was 900 grams of bread), but was made conditional upon filling work norms at extremely difficult and exhausting labor. If a prisoner did not complete his work norm he received 'punishment rations' which were very meager, and suffered from hunger in consequence.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Shmuel Avni, "Ba-Shevi ha-Russi u-ba-Tzava ha-Polani," in *Sefer Zikaron le-Kehillat Rakow*, Tel Aviv, 1959, pp. 158-163.

<sup>96</sup> Among those who were transferred to the Germans was Prof. Artur Ber, see his testimony, YVA, 0-3/1067; Testimony of a physician (J.B.), YVA, M-2/235; Testimony of Shlomo Sztokfisz, YVA, 0-3/2153.

<sup>97</sup> Facts and Documents, pp. 15-18.

<sup>98</sup> Testimony of Moshe Feldman, in *Sefer Gniewoszew* (Memorial Book), Tel Aviv, 1971, pp. 472-473; Avni, *op. cit.*



There was no racial segregation or abuse of prisoners in the Soviet camps. Jews and Poles shared the same fate on equal terms. Most of the enlisted men were released after the signing of the agreement between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Soviet Government in July 1941.

The fate of many of the captured officers was very different. Several thousands of them were detained in camps in the Smolensk area, to be murdered in a forest close to Katyn. Germany and the U.S.S.R. each accused the other of this unspeakable crime. Unearthing of the graves of the murdered officers led to the severing of relations between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Soviet Government. Western historians tend to believe that the murder is to be blamed on the Soviet authorities.

It is impossible to assess how many Jews were among the murdered officers. They undoubtedly constituted several dozens, possibly even hundreds. The 1943 official German publication, *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn*,<sup>99</sup> gives data about the bodies of 4,243 men who had been identified by June 7, 1943; there are dozens of names on the list of officers which are undisputably Jewish. The names include among others those of Izak Goldwicht, Abraham Engel, Leon Glickman, Maurycy Epstein, Jakob Warnzieher, Joakim Shreer, Karol Katz, Samuel Rosen, Leon Margulis, Abraham Nierenberg, Samuel Goldstein, Hirsch Oszerowicz-Wigdorowicz, David Godel, Baruch Szmalewicz, Samuel Ferszt, Abraham Wajdenfeld, Samuel Kalwari, Israel Hirschtritt, Jakob Fridson, Izak Gutman, Simon Hopfensztadt, Feiwel Bernstein, Moshe Landau, Salomon Jakob Osnos, Julian Lidenszat, Samuel Nelken, David Scharhaft, Markus Hirsch Lewender, Hilary Perek, Szymon Szmerner and Izak Frenkiel.

Jozef Mackiewicz, a member of the committee sent to Katyn by the Germans, wrote as follows about the Jews on the list of murdered officers:

I made one further discovery at Katyn which, though indirectly, throws further light on the identity of the true culprit. It was the scores of Jewish names which appeared in the list of victims published by the Germans. While I was looking through these lists, I could not resist the temptation of saying to the

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<sup>99</sup>Berlin, 1943, pp. 167-273.

German officer standing beside me: 'H'm... Quite a number of Jewish names here?'

'Yes. Quite so... Well, what? Is it worth while stressing it?' Nor did I stress it, I only stated a fact. Whoever is acquainted with that blind, raving anti-Jewish propaganda may well imagine how reluctantly they must have made the concession of publishing scores of Jewish names on the list of the Katyn victims! The same propaganda so obstinately identified Bolshevism with Jewry.<sup>100</sup>

Only very few, possibly no more than several hundreds, of the Jewish soldiers captured by the Germans remained alive by the end of the Second World War. The 25,000 to 30,000 prisoners of war who were sent to their homes at the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940 died later on in the ghettos or concentration camps. Several thousands were shot at Majdanek or on death marches, thousands died of hunger and savage cruelty in the concentration camps.

However, most of the prisoners taken by the Russians remained alive. At least 10,000 of them were mobilized anew into the Red Army or the Polish units set up by the U.S.S.R., and continued the fight against Nazi Germany.

**Source: "The Fate of Jewish Prisoners of War in the September 1939 Campaign"\*, *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. XII, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1977 pp. 297-333.**

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<sup>100</sup>Joseph Mackiewicz, *Wood Murders*, London, 1951, p. 158.

\* A chapter from a research project entitled "The Jews of Poland in the Regular Armies in the Days of World War II" (with the exception of the Berling Army in the U.S.S.R.), carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University, with the aid of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture in New York and friends of the Great Neck Institute, U.S.A.