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A TANGLED WEB

Polish-Jewish Relations in Wartime Northeastern Poland and the Aftermath

(PART TWO)

Mark Paul

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Part Two: Partisan Relations and Warfare

"One should not close one's eyes to the fact that Home Army units in the Wilno area were fighting against the Soviet partisans for the liberation of Poland. And that is why the Jews who found themselves on the opposing side perished at the hands of Home Army soldiers —as enemies of Poland, and not as Jews."
Yisrael Gutman
Historian, Yad Vashem Institute

1. Polish Partisans, Jewish Partisans, Soviet Partisans

According to Holocaust historians, the Jews who escaped the Nazi ghettos in northeastern Poland had to turn to the Soviet partisans for their salvation from both the Germans and the hostile local population.[1] The Polish partisans of the Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*—AK)—or "White Poles" as they are called in Soviet

[1] For a Jewish nationalist perspective on the organization of the Jewish partisan movement in northeastern Poland and its relationship with the Soviet partisans see Ainsztein, *Jewish Resistance in Nazi-Occupied Europe,* 302–25. The author relies exclusively on Jewish anecdotal sources and his pro-Soviet and anti-Polish bias is all too evident.

propaganda[2]—are portrayed as a "Fascist" formation who were collaborating with the Germans and engaged in a war directed primarily against the Jews and Soviets. Soviet historiography paints a remarkably similar picture with the focus, of course, being on the Soviet partisans.

Typical of Jewish ethno-nationalist historians, Yaffa Eliach repeatedly accuses the Home Army of hunting down and killing Jews hiding in the forest as well as those who were active in partisan groups. Another example is Howard L Adelson, who charges that

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[2] The designation "White Poles" (*belopoliaki* in Russian), which has a distinctively pejorative connotation, originated in Bolshevik propaganda during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1920. See Norman Davies, *White Eagle, Red Star: The Polish Soviet War, 1919–20* (London: Macdonald, 1972), 89. It was intended to suggest—falsely—that the Poles were allied with the White Russian forces and foreign imperialists in the Russian Civil War. The use of the term "White Poles" in a World War II context is anachronistic. It came into vogue after the Germans uncovered, in April 1943, mass graves of Polish officers and officials murdered by the Soviets in Katyn forest in the early part of 1940. When the Poles called for an investigation by the International Red Cross, the Soviet Union formally severed diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile in London on April 25, 1943, a step it had been planning for months. Molotov, the very person who had signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany to facilitate the invasion and partition of Poland in September 1939, issued an outrageous note stating that there was "no doubt that between the Allies' enemies, Hitler and the Polish Government, contact and collusion exist." The Soviets accused the Poles of acting "to please Hitler's tyranny" and iterated that they were acting in "collusion with the Hitlerite government." For the full text of the note see <http://web.archive.org/web/20080616072448/http://www.electronicmuseum.ca/Poland-WW2/katyn_memorial_wall/kmw_note.html>. That gave the cue as to how the Polish undeground was to be regarded. From that point, the term "White Poles" was used by the Soviets to smear the Poles—again falsely—as reactionary fascists. The Polish leader, General Władysław Sikorski, was accused of being a fascist who was collaborating with Nazi Germany (the Soviet Union's erstwhile ally), and the Polish partisans became "White Poles," "White bandits," "agents of Sikorski," or simply "Polish fascists." Soon after the Soviet partisan command in Moscow ordered the liquidation of the Polish underground loyal to the London government. See Tadeusz Gasztold, "Sowietyzacja i rusyfikacja Wileńszczyzny i Nowogródczyzny w działalności partyzantki sowieckiej w latach 1941–1944," in Adam Sudoł, ed., *Sowietyzacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej po 17 września 1939* (Bydgoszcz: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna w Bydgoszczy, 1998), 279; Kazimierz Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej: "NÓW"—Nowogródzki Okręg Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw: Pax, 1997), 143; Zygmunt Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody: Polsko-sowiecka wojna partyzancka na Nowogródczyźnie 1943–1944* (Warsaw: Rytm, 1999), 114. Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky notes that these as well as other epithets such as "national fascists" and "Polish-Hitlerite units" were used to describe the Home Army in Soviet documents from that era. See Leonid Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.* (Tel Aviv: Biblioteka Matveia Chernogo, 2000), 141. This book is available online in English translation as Leonid Smilovitsky, *Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941–1944,* Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/belarus/Belarus.html#TOC102>. Stalin did not shy away from making such charges openly in his dealings with Western leaders. In an outburst at the Tehran Conference in 1943, the man who approved the Katyn massacre hurled accusation after accusation at the London Poles, calling them cowards, Hitler's accomplices, and murderers. See Lynne Olson and Stanley Cloud, *A Question of Honor. The Kościuszko Squadron: Forgotten Heroes of World War II* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 296. Curiously, the term "White Poles" was also borrowed by Nazi German propaganda. The relentless repetition of this hateful propaganda doubtless had a considerable effect on how Soviet-Jewsh partisans came to view Polish partisans. Today, the term "White Poles" retains currency only in Holocaust historiography. The anti-Polish propaganda renewed in 1943 was in fact a continuation of the anti-Polish campaign that became widespread at the time of the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. For a description of that campaign, see Ewa M. Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenpoint Press, 2000), 163–81; Ewa M. Thompson, "Nationalist Propaganda in the Soviet Russian Press, 1939–1941," *Slavic Review,* vol. 50, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 385–99. In spite of all this Soviet agitation, intensive efforts on the part of the Germans, starting in 1943, to win over the Poles to the "anti-Bolshevik front" met with a complete fiasco. See Czesław Brzoza and Andrzej Sowa, *Historia Polski 1918–1945* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 609–10, 639–40.

> The Polish Home Army, the *Armja Krajova* [sic], which was supposedly struggling against the Nazis, pursued the slaughter of the Jews with greater vigor than the war against the German conquerors.[3]

Many Jewish historians share these views. Yitzhak Arad provides the following synopsis:

> In Poland, the Home Army (A.K.—*Armia Krajowa*), the general Polish Partisan Movement, was not open to Jews. Moreover, thousands of Jews were murdered by the rightist factions of the official Polish underground. In eastern Poland, in Byelorussia, and sometimes in other areas as well, groups of Polish rightist guerillas took an active role in the killing of many Jewish families and partisans in the forest.[4]

> In 1943, armed anti-Soviet groups belonging to … the Polish AK began operating in the forests of western Byelorussia … They were diehard anti-Semites, identifying the Jews with the hated Soviet rule. They prevented Jews from finding refuge or establishing partisan bases in the areas they controlled and murdered many of them.[5]

But the charges do not stop there, especially in popular writings. A few examples (of many) from that repertoire of crude propaganda accusing Poles of *outright collaboration* with the Germans—a charge that

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[3] Actually, this is part of a long litany of charges often hurled at Poles. In his introduction to a Holocaust memoir cited in this book, Howard L. Adelson, professor of history at the City University of New York, writes: "It was not by chance that the inhuman Nazi murderers chose Poland as the charnel house for European Jewry. With forethought they recognized that within Poland the neighbors of the Jews would assist in the slaughter. … Even the Home Army, the *Armja Krajova* [sic], which was supposedly struggling against the Nazis, pursued the slaughter of the Jews with greater vigor than the war against the German conquerors. The local peasantry displayed an atavistic savagery that is unequalled in the annals of human history. Jews died while their neighbors exulted in their suffering." See Samuel Gruber, as told to Gertrude Hirschler, *I Chose Life* (New York: Shengold, 1978), 6.

[4] Yitzhak Arad, "Jewish Armed Resistance in Eastern Europe," in Yisrael Gutman and Livia Rothkirchen, eds., *The Catastrophe of European Jews: Antecedents, History, Reflections: Selected Papers* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), 509. The charge that the Home Army did not accept Jews into its ranks was dealt with earlier in this essay. Arad also refers to a group Jewish ghetto fighters from Warsaw who made it to the forest and were allegedly killed by the Home Army. The events in Wyszków forest are dealt with in Part Three of this book. Moshe Kahanowitz has made even stronger accusations, alleging that "the majority" of Poland's Christian population "willingly collaborated with the Germans in the extermination of the Jews. Many of them indeed, exceeded even the Germans in their bloodlust and their insensate hatred of Jews. … The 'good friends', who for a time agreed to help the Jews to hide, sooner or later murdered them in cold blood after first robbing them of whatever possessions they had. … The 'A.K.' refused to accept Jews in its ranks. Moreover one of its objectives was to exterminate the Jewish survivors who had sought refuge in the forests, in the villages and in other hideouts. … The hatred of the Poles for the Jews by far exceeded that of any other Eastern European nation. Most Poles welcomed Hitler's anti-Jewish campaign … In that region of the forests in which the 'A.K.' operated not a single Jewish fugitive from the Ghettoes [sic] remained alive." See Moshe Kahanowitz, "Why no Separate Jewish Partisan Movement Was Established During World War II," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 1 (1957): 153–67, at pp. 153–54, 165. The views of Shmuel Krakowski in Krakowski, *The War of the Doomed* and Yisrael Gutman and Shmuel Krakowski, *Unequal Victims: Poles and Jews During World War Two* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1986) will be addressed later.

[5] Yitzhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, in association with Yad Vashem, The International Institute for Holocaust Reseach, 2010), 342. See also p. 193, to the same effect: "The AK viewed the Jews as a pro-Soviet element and did not accept them into their ranks, murdering many of those hiding in the forests and villages."

the Soviets, once themselves steadfast allies of the Nazis (1939–1941), started to disseminate during the war—will suffice.

> The pro-Nazi bands included the White Poles … These Polish fascists murdered Byelorussians, Red Partisans, and—first and foremost—Jews.[6]

> One group of partisans … sometimes fought on the side of the Germans. They were Polish farmers by day and partisans by night who carried out the orders of the exiled Polish government in London. These orders specifically stated that … all Poles were to see to it that no Jews remained in Poland after the war. Their slogan was "Polska Bez Zydow [Żydów]" or "Poland Without Jews." These were the men of the Armia Krajowa or "Home Army", known to us as the A.K. At the beginning, they had a special status with the Germans because they carried on the work of exterminating the Jews and Communists.[7]

> Various rumors were circulating concerning the relations between these Poles ["White" bands] and the Germans. It was said that the Germans themselves were organizing the bands and arming them so that they could fight against the "Red" partisans and annihilate the last of the Jews who were still in hiding.
>
> The rank and file in the bands knew nothing about the agreement with the Germans. They thought that they were fighting to free Poland. However, their leaders had accepted the authority of the enemy and were collaborating with it. They carried out their task faithfully, at least concerning the annihilation of the Jews. Thirsting for blood, they were hunting down the last remnants of Jews in the forests and destroying them.[8]

These various writings share certain common characteristics: they are analytically deficient, generally lack context, causation, and even chronolgy, and make use of Jewish anecdotal materials to the exclusion of archival sources of non-Jewish origin. Implicit in them is the premise that no amount of concrete deeds on the part of the Jews could had an impact on the conduct of the Polish underground, but rather its behaviour was conditioned by an endemic brand of anti-Semitism with a murderous streak. That thesis will be tested empirically in this study, drawing on a broad array of archival and other sources. The claim of Polish collaboration with the Nazis is simply a ploy to draw attention away from the whole-hearted Jewish

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[6] Lester Eckman and Chaim Lazar, *The Jewish Resistance: The History of the Jewish Partisans in Lithuania and White Russia during the Nazi Occupation 1949–1945* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1977), 10. The authors fail to notice that the major thrust of the Home Army's activities—such as the 63-day Warsaw Uprising of August 1944 in which 200,000 Poles perished—was directed against the Germans, and that many Belorussians (and some Jews) joined the ranks of the same Home Army that was allegedly murdering them off. These authors' opinion about Poles in general conforms wholly to their view of the Home Army: "the Poles who lived in White Russia … ambushed every Jew who remained alive." Ibid., 84.

[7] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 119. What "special status" the Home Army enjoyed with the Germans is nowhere explained.

[8] Chaim Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1985), 166.

collaboration with the Soviets. It is also a projection of their own relationship with the Soviets onto the Poles.

The notion that the Polish Home Army allegedly "did not want to fight against the Germans" and reached a political agreement or entered into a secret military alliance with the Germans[9] is not substantiated by Polish or German archival sources. In fact, it has been amply debunked by historians. The matter of contacts between the Home Army and the German military in the Wilno and Nowogródek regions has an

[9] See, for example, Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 629, 746 n.1. A careful examination of the documents found in Bundesarchiv Koblenz file R 6/369, fol. 1–25, especially the memorandum of SS-Sturmbannführer (Dr.) Horst Wulff, the Gebietskommissar of the Wilno region, dated January 18, 1944, contradicts Eliach's claims and her interpretation of that document. In fact, Wulff complains of incessant Polish attacks on German and Lithuanian outposts and states that "nothing concrete was agreed to with the Polish bands." He also makes it abundantly clear that, even for the Germans, an agreement of a political nature was never contemplated. This was a purely tactical and temporary arrangement.

extensive scholarly literature,[10] and is discussed again later in context and in more depth. While local commanders of two units of the Home Army in the Nowogródek District—Lieutenant Józef Świda (code name "Lech") and Lieutenant Adolf Pilch (code name "Góra")—did, for a brief period in the early part of 1944, enter into temporary ceasefires in exchange for weapons and ammunition from the Germans, they did so in order to defend themselves against relentless attacks by well-armed Soviet partisans. Overtures from

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[10] Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Rozmowy z Wehrmachtem w Wilnie: Luty 1944," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 69 (1984): 81–121; Józef Świda, "Wyjaśnienia dotyczące okresu 1943/1944 roku," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 73 (1985): 74–80; Zygmunt Szczęsny Brzozowski, *Litwa–Wilno, 1910–1945* (Paris: Spotkania, 1987), 150–55; Krzysztof Tarka, *Komendant Wilk: Z dziejów Wileńskiej Armii Krajowej* (Warsaw: Volumen, 1990), 66–70; Jerzy Turonek, *Białoruś pod okupacją niemiecką* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1993), 203–208; Michael Foedrowitz, "W poszukiwaniu 'modus vivendi': Kontakty i rozmowy pomiędzy okupantami a okupowanymi dotyczące porozumienia niemiecko-polskiego w czasie II wojny światowej," *Mars: Problematyka i historia wojskowości,* vol. 2 (1994): 165–80; Jarosław Wołkonowski, "Wileńskie rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w lutym 1944 roku," *Mars,* vol. 2 (1994): 181–202; Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Wileńska AK a Niemcy," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 110 (1994): 198–222; J. Zdzisław Szyłejko, "Współpraca wileńskiej AK z Niemcami—rzeczywistość czy fikcja?" *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 112 (1995): 233–36; Jarosław Wołkonowski, "Rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w świetle nowych dokumentów niemieckich," and Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej w pierwszej połowie 1944 roku na Wileńszczyźnie," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 95–122, 156–57; Jarosław Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Adiutor, 1996), 160–61, 171–84, 250; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 173–89; Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej,* 102–114; Zygmunt Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 173–82; Longin Tomaszewski, *Wileńszczyzna lat wojny i okupacji 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Rytm, 1999), 321–23; Tomasz Strzembosz, *Rzeczpospolita podziemna: Społeczeństwo polskie a państwo podziemne 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Krupski i S-ka, 2000), 100–103; Kazimierz Krajewski, comp. and ed., *Nowogródzki Okręg AK w dokumentach* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej and Rytm, 2009), 48–51, 247–52. See also Bernhard Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front: Besatzung, Kollaboration und Widerstand in Weißrußland 1941–1944* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, Schriften des Bundesarchivs 53, 1998), 285–86; Bernhard Chiari, "Reichsführer-SS—Kein Pakt mit Slaven: Deutsch-polnische Kontakte im Wilna-Gebiet 1944," *Osteuropa-Archiv,* vol. 50, no. 4 (April 2000): A133–53; Bernhard Chiari, "Kriegslist oder Bündnis mit dem Feind?: Deutsch-polnische Kontakte 1943/44," in Bernhard Chiari, ed., with Jerzy Kochanowski, *Die polnische Heimatarmee: Geschichte und Mythos der Armia Krajowa seit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2003), 497–527. Chiari, however, completely ignores the Soviet factor in his assessment of Polish contacts with the Germans; he does not appreciate that the Soviets repeatedly rejected Polish overtures for cooperation and then turned on the Polish partisans. For a critique of Chiari's treatment of this topic see Stanisława Lewandowska, "Wileńskie rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w lutym 1944 r.," *Dzieje Najnowsze,* no. 2 (2002): 101–45. Some of the discussion on this topic is summarized in Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 88–90.

Remarkably, despite this existence of this extensive body of literature, writing in 2011, Jewish historian Leonid Rein claims that "Polish historians, quite understandably, prefer to remain silent about the contact at the end of the German occupation in Byelorussia between some AK units and Germans. Only Yerzy Turonak [sic—Jerzy Turonek] dedicates a few pages to the topic in his study on the German occupation of Byelorussia." See Leonid Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns: Collaboration in Byelorussia during World War II* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 358–59. Even more remarkably, that author is unfamiliar with keys studies on Soviet partisans by historian Bogdan Musiał, his knowledge of Polish scholarship is limited to a few articles translated into German, and his knowledge of Soviet literature is also extremely sparse. This is especially evident in his treatment of the Soviet invasion of Eastern Poland in September 1939, where he denies Jewish collaboration with the Soviets directed at Poles that even Israeli historians like Dov Levin and Ben-Cion Pinchuk document (pp. 69–72); in his assessment of Polish-Belorussian relations, where he refers to alleged "full-scale ethnic cleansings" (p. 98); and in his treatment of relations between Soviet and Polish partisans, where he ignores important Soviet anti-Polish pronouncements and massacres of Polish partisans (e.g., Naliboki and Lake Narocz), writing instead of "mutual attacks" that "intensified" in the summer of 1943 (p. 359). Rein claims—contrary to all evidence—that the Home Army fought on the side of the Germans in the July 1944 battle for Wilno (p. 364). Interestingly, Rein does not acknowledge Polish names for interwar Eastern Poland, and Polish names, cities and even *Armia Krajowa* (Home Army) are consistently misspelled. This is a consistent pattern on his part. Bizarrely, Rein latches on to the writings of the notoriously pro-German Władysław Studnicki, who did not formally represent any political organization and forged his own peculiar political agenda in opposition to the mainstream, as an alleged "indication of their [the Poles'] expectations from the Germans and the basis for their cooperation." Ibid., 130. Official Polish underground reports make it abundantly clear that Studnicki was a "black sheep" who had no following or influence and was not even taken seriously by the Germans themselves. So much for Rein's insights into the Polish political landscape and inclinations of the Poles. See Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust,* 111; Tadeusz Pełczyński, Halina Czarnocka, Józef Garliński, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, and Włodzimierz Otocki, eds., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 1: *Wrzesień 1939–czerwiec 1941* (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1970), 62, 199.

high-ranking German military officials to enter into a strategic alliance against the Soviets, which were intensified in February 1944, were not taken up by the command of the Wilno District of the Home Army and no formal agreements were ever concluded with the Germans.[11] Indeed, both the Polish government in exile and Home Army High Command strictly forbade such contacts and agreements. (During his

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[11] In the wake of treacherous assaults by Soviet partisans, the German military leadership made overtures to both individual unit commanders of the Nowogródek District of the Home Army, about which there is more later, and the command of the Wilno District of the Home Army. After meeting secretly with the Germans in February 1944 under a false identity, Lieutenant-Colonel Aleksander Krzyżanowski ("Wilk"), the head of the Wilno District of the Home Army, relayed information about the discussions to the Home Army High Command in Warsaw which forbade any further dealings with the Germans. German proposals for joint actions against the Soviet partisans were rejected. Internal German reports about those negotiations, however, did not accurately reflect their content, though they certainly did not indicate, as Soviet and Jewish sources suggest, that the Germans actually reached any formal agreement with the Poles. See, for example, Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Rozmowy z Wehrmachtem w Wilnie: Luty 1944," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 69 (1984): 81–121; Lewandowska, "Wileńskie rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w lutym 1944 r.," *Dzieje Najnowsze,* no. 2 (2002): 101–45, especially 122 ff; Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Wileńska AK a Niemcy." *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 110 (1994): 198–222. (It is noteworthy that a Volksdeutsch who was captured by a Polish partisan unit, from which he later managed to escape, reported that their activities were directed at both the Germans and Soviets, with no mention of Jews. See Lewandowska, "Wileńskie rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w lutym 1944 r.," *Dzieje Najnowsze,* no. 2 (2002): 117.) After being rebuffed by the Poles, the Germans in retaliation deployed collaborationist Lithuanian "defence forces" under the command of General Povilas Plechavičius in an unsuccessful attempt to rid the Wilno area of Home Army units. See Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Rozmowy z Wehrmachtem w Wilnie: Luty 1944," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 69 (1984): 108–11; Lewandowska, "Wileńskie rozmowy niemiecko-polskie w lutym 1944 r.," *Dzieje Najnowsze,* no. 2 (2002): 136–38. Notwithstanding those reservations, Israeli historian Yitzhak Arad relies on German documents for "the details of the agreement," and accepts that German version as an undertaking by the Home Army to fight against "Bolshevist-Jewish gangs" and an effective "armistice". See Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 292.

As Timothy Snyder points out, "Polish commanders were in contact with *both* the Soviets and the Germans at various points, but could make a true alliance with *neither*: the Polish goal, after all, was to restore an independent Poland within its prewar boundaries." See Snyder, *Bloodlands,* 247. Jewish historians have problems in getting the facts straight. Historian Alexander Prusin advances the following unsupportable claims about the aforementioned talks: "In February 1944 the AK commander of the Vilnius [Wilno] district met with the German representatives and *agreed* to take actions against the Soviets, if the Germans promised to refrain from anti-Polish actions. Having received arms and munitions, in the first half of 1944 a number of Polish units *joined* the Germans in the fight against Soviet partisans." See Alexander V. Prusin, *The Lands Between: Conflict in the East European Borderlands, 1870–1992* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 189. As noted earlier, no agreement was entered into and no joint military actions undertaken with the Germans against the Soviet partisans. Prusin's treatment of Polish issues in general is rather uneven and his information is often incomplete or inaccurate as the following examples illustrate. He is silent about the massacres in Naliboki and Koniuchy, the latter massacre being especially problematic for the assessment of Jewish partisans. When dealing with the treatment of the Lithuanian minority in interwar Poland, Prusin fails to notice that the Polish authorities were often simply retaliating for measures taken by the Lithuanian authorities against the Polish minority in Lithuania, about whose fate he is silent, that the Lithuanian minority engaged in anti-Polish insurgency (as did the Belorussian minority), and that the Lithuanian government financed the subversive and terrorist activities of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists. (Prusin states, at p. 104, that the Baltic governments granted their ethnic minorities extensive political and civil rights, although that simply did not apply to the Poles in Lithuania; furthermore, the rights of other minorities soon suffered serious erosion.) The latter topic has an extensive literature including Krzysztof Buchowski, *Polacy w niepodległym państwie litewskim 1918–1940* (Białystok: Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 1999); Joanna Januszewska-Jurkiewicz, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1920–1939,* 2nd edition (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2011), especially at pp. 361–66 (Lithuanian insurgency), 405–6 (Belarussian insurgency), 564–68 (Lithuanian clerical agitation), 571–72 (cause of Polish retaliation). Prusin also accuses interwar Poland of oppressing the Ukrainian minority, a charge that was dismissed by the League of Nations in 1932, after careful investigation of the so-called 1930 pacification by the Polish authorities of Ukrainian insurgency. See Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 194. (Notwithstanding these measures, terror and violence directed against Polish institutions, officials and civilians continued unabated throughout the 1930s. See, for example, Władysław Łabiak, "Gdzie miejsce narodu?," *Na Rubieży: Czasopismo historyczno-publicystyczne* (Wrocław), no. 130 (2013): 54.) Prusin also glosses over (at p. 107) the extent of Ukrainian (and to a lesser extent Belorussian) interwar terrorist activities, both nationalist and Communist inspired, directed against Polish authorities, institutions, and civilians, as well as moderate Ukrainians, and the fact that Polish reprisals resulted from such activities since no government would have tolerated them. It was opposition to Polish rule that triggered murders and sabotage and not, as Prusin suggests, the activities of the Polish authorities. (The Polish minority in Germany and Lithuania was even more oppressed but did not resort to terrorism; the situation in Eastern Galicia was more akin to that in postwar

internment after the collapse of the Warsaw Uprsing of August 1944, the most formidable anti-Nazi uprising in occupied Europe by far, Home Army Commander General Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski was repeatedly approached by German officials intent on creating a collaborationist amy. He steadfastly refused.[12]) The unauthorized dealings with the Germans of two beleaguered Home Army local commanders were a temporary and purely tactical expedient, undertaken for their very survival, after the Soviet partisans had turned on them from mid-1943 and were intent on destroying them. This strategy occurred at a time when the tied was turning against the Germans and was not intended to bolster the German war effort (which it hardly accomplished), since the Home Army continued to attack the Germans vigorously in both the Nowogródek and Wilno Districts. Rather, it was a desperate act of self-defence against the treacherous policies of the Soviets, the Nazis' erstwhile allies. It would be as malicious to read into this strategy alleged Polish support for the Nazi regime, just as it would be to accuse the Western Allies of supporting totalitarianism and the Gulag for having accepted the Soviet Union into their ranks, after Hitler turned on Stalin in June 1941. Moreover, as we shall see, Polish partisans continued to attack German garrisons and other positions throughout this period,[13] such that the Germans questioned the wisdom of having entered into these arrangements.[14] In fact, German reports rated the Home Army as a more disciplined and effective combat adversary than the Soviet partisans.[15] As Soviet field reports confirm, the Polish population continued to be firmly opposed to German rule.[16] Furthermore, there is credible information that the Soviet partisans were more inclined to target Polish partisans than Germans. A Home Army plant in the Lipiczany forest (Puszcza Lipiczańska), who brought back information on the spy network established in the area by the Soviet partisans to gather information about the Home Army, discerned that "the main goal of the Soviet partisans was to neutralize the Home Army 'activists' when the Soviet Army advanced. Fighting the Germans was secondary for Soviet partisans."[17] An order to eliminate Polish partisans was found in the

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[12] T. [Tadeusz] Bor-Komorowski, *The Secret Army,* 1st U.S. ed. (Nashville: Battery Press, 1984), 374–75, 380–81, 383, 386–87. This first English edition of this book was: Tadeusz Komorowski, *The Secret Army* (London: Gollancz, 1951).

[13] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 180, 187. See also Bojomir Tworzyański, *As I Remember: Polish Home Army in the Konecki and Nowogródek Regions, 1939–1945* (Markham, Ontario: n.p. 2009), 63–104; translated from the Polish: *Tak jak pamiętam: AK–Ziemia Konecka i Nowogródzka 1939–1945* (Lódź: n.p., 1995). A Home Army commander in the Szczuczyn area of the Nowogródek District, Tworzyański describes the elimination of Soviet spies and German collaborators, as well as numerous attacks on German trains, gendarmes, SS, and Belorussian collaborators throughout the entire period. Attacks on German outposts and troops allowed the Poles to replenish their supply of arms. Captured Germans were routinely released after being disarmed and questioned or exchanged for captured Polish partisans so as to prevent retaliations against the civilian population, something that was not practiced by the Soviet partisans.

[14] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 187–88. A German military report of April 26, 1944 concluded that the arrangement was used by the Home Army to their advantage and had caused the Wehrmacht more harm than good.

[15] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 188.

[16] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 28.

[17] Tworzyański, *As I Remember,* 60.

possession of a leader of the Chapayev detachment of the Stalin Brigade on December 2, 1943.[18] Tellingly, Soviet partisans did not attack the Nazi concentration camp in Kołdyczewo, even though it was situated in the area where their largest forces were concentrated.[19] More importantly, Soviet partisans were also known to have entered into local ceasefires with the Germans, some of which are described in Jewish sources.[20] According to historian Kenneth Slepyan, "local partisans occasionally negotiated informal truces with nearby German garrisons, ensuring quiet for the enemy while safeguarding their families' homes."[21]

Before the Soviet partisans turned on their Polish counterparts in the latter part of 1943, the Poles had undertaken many joint operations with the Soviets against the Germans (e.g., Nowogródek on July 11, 1942, Żołudek in May 1943,[22] Wołma in July 1943). Cooperation resumed with the arrival of the Red Army, but was short-lived. The city of Wilno (Vilnius in Lithuania, Vilna in Russian) was liberated in July

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[18] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 533.

[19] Michał Wołłejko, "Obóz zagłady Kołdyczewo i antypolska działalność białoruskich nacjonalistów w latach 1941–1944: Rekonensans badawczy," *Glaukopis: Pismo społeczno-kulturalne,* no. 31 (2014): 83–94.

[20] Isaac Kowalski describes an agreement that Soviet-Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest entered into with the Germans: "One day one of our contact men gave us the message that a German post … authorized him to ask the partisans if the latter wanted to live in peace with the German post. The answer was—Yes. The result was a gentlemen's agreement: that the Germans would not obstruct our passage through the village and we would not burn down their bunkers in the night. The agreement was honored by both sides …" See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 334; also reproduced in Isaac Kowalski, comp. and ed., *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945* (Brooklyn, New York: Jewish Combatants Publishers House, 1984–1991), vol. 4 (1991), 391. Sulia Wolozhinski Rubin, who was a member of the Bielski partisan group, recalls similar arrangements in Naliboki forest: "We settled our tents on one side of Lake Kroman [Kromań] … On the other side of the river the Germans settled their posts. … As time progressed, our men would talk to the Germans. They weren't interested in getting killed either; and so it went on." See Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 134. It would be as misguided to assume that the beleaguered Poles were pro-German or even pro-Nazi, as it would be to conclude that all the Jewish partisans who aligned themselves with the Soviets were Communists or supported the Soviet regime for ideological reasons. Moreover, these local Polish Home Army dealings with the Germans cannot be compared to the serious flirting that Zionist factions in Palestine under Abraham Stern and Yitzhak Shamir underook in the early 1940s, when the German army was still victorious. The Palestnian Zionists contemplated joint military actions with the Germans against the British and a long-term alliance with Nazi Germany in exchange for assistance in transferring Jews from Europe to Palestine. They were thus predicated on full support for the Nazi war effort against the Allies. See Yehuda Bauer, *Jews For Sale: Nazi-Jewish Negotiations, 1933–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994) and Edwin Black, *The Transfer Agreement: The Dramatic Story of the Pact between the Third Reich and Jewish Palestine,* Revised edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Brookline Books, 1999). Another point of reference is the case of 300 Jewish soldiers who served in the Finnish army and found themselves in league with Nazi Germany when Finland, who had a mutual enemy in the Soviet Union, joined the war in June 1941. Their alibi is: "We did not help the Germans. We had a common enemy which was the Russians and that was it." Their exoneration goes like this: "What were they supposed to do? That is the question nobody can answer." The Finnish government rejected Germany's request to hand over its Jews, and the thwarted the Finnish State Police efforts to do so. However, the Germans did not press the issue, as they were afraid to lose Finish cooperation against the Soviets. Finland did hand over to the Germans Soviet soldiers taken prisoner during the winter was in 1940 as part of a scheme to exchange prisoners. Among them were Jews who perished in German custody. See Paul Kendall, "The Jews Who Fought for Hitler: 'We did not help the Germans. We had a common enemy'," *The Telegraph* (London), March 9, 2014.

[21] Kenneth Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas: Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 160.

[22] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 204.

1944 by a joint assault of the Red Army and the Home Army, with the Poles initiating the attack.[23] Afterwards, the Soviets promptly disarmed the Polish forces by stealth.[24] This pattern of treachery characterized Soviet-Polish relations before, during and after the war. The best known example was the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, the largest anti-German armed insurrection in occupied Europe: after encouraging the Poles to take up arms, the Soviet Army stood by idly on the east bank of the Vistula during the 63-day heroic struggle and watched the Germans massacre Polish resistance fighters and some 150,000 civilians.[25]

The evolution of writings on the relations between the Poles and the Soviet and Jewish partisans is well worth tracing. Soviet reports from December 1942 attest to a rather favourable attitude toward the Soviet

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[23] Home Army forces initiated the attack on Wilno on the night of July 6–7, 1944, but had to retreat in the face of overwhelming German forces. The Soviet Army launched another assault later that day (July 7), supported by the Home Army underground in the city, and the Germans were driven from the city by July 13, after heavy fighting. Some 500 Poles fell in battle. Tadeusz Piotrowski is mistaken when he suggests that it was for some hidden motives that only a third of the available AK forces fought with the Soviets to liberate Wilno. See Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 89–90. Rather, it was because the attack was advanced by one day (from July 7 to July 6, 1944), that almost half of the Polish forces did not arrive in time. See Roman Korab-Żebryk, *Operacja wileńska AK* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1985), 202. On the battle for Wilno see Tomaszewski, *Wileńszczyzna lat wojny i okupacji 1939–1945,* 476–95; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 267; Strzembosz, *Rzeczpospolita podziemna*, 272; Stanisława Lewandowska, *Życie codzienne Wilna w latach II wojny światowej,* Second revised and expanded edition (Warsaw: Neriton and Bellona, 2001), 322–25. The editor of the official anthology of the Jewish partisans, however, presents an entirely different (and skewed) version of these events: "the city was recaptured by the combined efforts of the Jewish partisans and the Soviet army" (sic, in that order). See Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 434. Yitzhak Arad provides a somewhat different assessment: "The great offensive by the Soviet armed forces began on June 23, 1944, and within weeks, they covered 220 miles and reached the entrance to Vilna [Wilno]. The Vilna partisans joined the Soviet army units. Soviet forces cut off Vilna on July 7 and 8, 1944. … Jewish partisans from Rudniki forests followed the Soviet Army into the city." See Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 460. (Afterwards, Yitzhak Arad joined the NKVD and was active in combatting the anti-Communist Lithuanian underground. He was dismissed from its ranks for his undisciplined behaviour. See Piotr Zychowicz, "Wybory Icchaka Arada," *Rzeczpospolita,* July 12, 2008.) The Soviet partisans from Rudniki forest that arrived in Wilno only after the capture of the city immediately set up a militia. See Kazimierz Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach: Armia Krajowa na Kresach Wschodnicj II Rzeczypospolitej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literacie, 2015), 611. Kowalski is also perplexed why, after the liberation of Wilno, "Polish partisans within the city still went around with guns on their shoulders. Nothing was done about them. Like the others, they were shortly after ordered to demobilize and the majority obeyed." See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 349. Because of the intervention of a Jew who worked for the Soviet supreme command, Jewish partisans were excused from serving in the Red Army on its perilous advance into East Prussia. They were allowed to remain in Wilno where they were presented with Medals of Valour, the highest honour in the Red Army. See Rich Cohen, *The Avengers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 154. According to Isaac Kowalski, the partisans of the almost exclusively Jewish "Nekamah" ("Vengeance" of "Revenge") unit were appointed to various important economic posts in the city. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 386. Astoundingly, writing in 2011, Jewish historian Leonid Rein claims that the "Germans used the AK forces in the defense of Vilnius [Wilno] against the Soviet Army." See Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 364.

[24] The Soviets apprehended 6,800 Polish Home Army fighters by stealth and disarmed them, executing hundreds. See Jarosław Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Adiutor, 1996), 266–83; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Zygmunt Boradyn, Andrzej Chmielarz, and Henryk Piskunowicz, eds., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 1997), 70.

[25] The story has been retold brilliantly in Norman Davies, *Rising '44: 'The Battle for Warsaw'* (London: Macmillan, 2003).

partisans on the part of the Polish population, including Polish self-defence and partisan groups.[26] However, in a report filed on September 16, 1944, concerning the "History and Formation of the M. I. Kalinin Partisan Detachment," Tuvia Bielski (or Belsky, known as Anatolii Belskii in Soviet sources), the legendary

[26] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 15 (information from the chief of the intelligence department of the Belorussian Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, dated December 21, 1942).

Jewish partisan leader in Naliboki forest (Puszcza Nalibocka), wrote about "Poles who joined the White Polish legions fighting alongside Germans against Soviet authorities."[27] Why the dramatic change?

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[27] "Jewish Units in the Soviet Partisan Movement: Selected Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 23 (1993): 400–11, at p. 408. According to that document, which was co-authored by Tuvia Bielski, the detachment commissar and its chief-of-staff Malbin, read in conjunction with Bielski's postwar memoir reproduced, in part, in Albert Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy: Contributions to a History of Jewish Resistance in Poland* (New York: The Orion Press, 1959), 352–72, and in Meyer Barkai, *The Fighting Ghettos* (Philadelphia and New York: Lippincott, 1962), 241–64, the following chronology—which is at times unclear—emerges. The Bielski brothers quickly adapted to the Soviet takeover in 1939 and took up positions in the regime's local apparatus. After the German invasion in the summer of 1941, they lived as fugitives in villages and in the forest, with the help of friendly Polish and Belorussian peasants. Their forest group grew to twenty or thirty by the summer of 1942, and Tuvia, as the eldest brother, was chosen to be the leader. It was only in the late summer that they became a real partisan detachment and began growing rapidly in numbers. They called themselves the Zhukov otriad, after Marshal Georgii Zhukov. Fearing annihilation, they "affiliated" with the Soviet partisans in the fall of 1942, and were soon subordinated to Viktor Panchenkov, a local Soviet partisan commander. Tuvia's brother Asael was second in command, and his brother Zus was in charge of reconnaissance (or "*razvedka*" in Russian). In mid-1943, about 50 young men were transferred to Russian detachments. Around September (or possibly June) 1943, Bielski's group became part of the Kirov Brigade. The armed partisans formed the Ordzhonikidze unit or detachment (*otriad*) and were placed under a Russian commander and a Russian commissar, with Zus Bielski remaining as head of reconnaissance. Tuvia Bielski was appointed commander of the family group, which officially became the Kalinin detachment and included armed defenders as well, but the group's primary task was to provide specialty services for Soviet partisan groups in the forest. Asael Bielski joined the Kirov Brigade, but later—together with some other Jewish partisans—returned to the Bielski group. Asael was reappointed as assistant to the commander and commander of the fighting forces. See also Nechama Tec, *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 43, 106, 126–27, 131; Yehuda Bauer, "Nowogródek—The Story of a *Shtetl*," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol., 35, no. 2 (2007): 54–59. According to the sequence established by Peter Duffy and Yehuda Bauer, based largely on Tec's biography *Defiance,* around January 1943, the Bielski group became part of the Lenin Brigade, which was subordinate to the leadership of the Baranowicze Branch of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement, headed by Vasilii Chernyshev, whose *nom de guerre* was Major General Platon. The group was then known as the Second Company of the October detachment (previously Unit 96), under the command of Panchenkov. In June 1943, the detachment received a new name, Ordzhonikidze, and the Lenin Brigade, which was headed by Fedor (Fiodor) Sinichkin and included Bielski's group, was transformed into the Kirov Brigade. Sinichkin was succeeded by Sergei Vasiliev as brigade commander in August 1943, and the Bielski non-combatant detachment, which was severed from the much smaller combatant group, became the Kalinin detachment. This was a large family camp that provided for its own needs and provided services (such as sewing, shoemaking, baking and medical care) to the Soviet partisans in the area. About half the combatants (around 100 partisans), however, left the combatant group and made their way to the non-combatant group. Early in 1944 the Kalinin detachment was removed from the brigade structure and made an "independent" detachment that reported directly to General Sokolov (Efim Gapeev), the commander of the Lida Concentration of the Soviet partisans. The combatant group, Ordzhonikidze—formally under the command of Captain Lushenko, but in fact led by Zus Bielski—counted 117 partisans (including 9 Gentiles) on the eve of 1943. The combatant group engaged mostly in "economic missions" (i.e., raids on peasants) rather than than "face-to-face confrontations with the Germans or local police." See Peter Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers: The True Story of Three Men Who Defied the Nazis, Saved 1,200 Jews, and Built a Village in the Forest* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 91, 126–28, 169, 188–89, 190–91, 209–210, 227–28. From the fall of 1943 to 1944, the Ordzhonikidze unit is said to have participated in 37 combat missions (most of them jointly with other Soviet units) and mined railway lines west and northwest of Nowogródek. (There was only one railway line running close to this area.) Ibid., 208, 265. Soviet sources culled by Polish historians give the following, somewhat different, sequence: Bielski's family group was removed from the Ordzhonikidze detachment of the Kirov Brigade in November 1943. As of January 3, 1944, the Bielski detachment was removed from the Kirov Brigade and reported directly to Sokolov, who was Platon's second in command; however, the Ordzhonikidze detachment remained in the Kirov Brigade. On May 6, 1944, the Bielski detachment became the Kalinin detachment. The Baranowicze Concentration had two Jewish "family" units: Bielski's (Ordzhonikidze, later Kalinin) and Zorin's (Unit 106). At the end of April 1944, the former consisted of 941 persons (of whom 162 were armed), and the latter had 562 persons (of whom 73 were armed). Thus the vast majority of the membership of these two "family" groups was made up of non-fighters. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 84. By July 1944, the final tally for Bielski's group was 991, with the Ordzhonikidze detachment accounting for 149 members. See Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 259. Only a very small number of the armed partisans fell in combat with the Germans. After the arrival of the Red Army, Tuvia Bielski hastily disbanded his force to make it difficult for his fighters to be conscripted into the army and soon left for central Poland with his brother Zus. He then moved on to Palestine before immigrating to the United States. Ibid., 264, 266. The youngest Bielski brother, Aharon Bielski, who

In memoirs published shortly after the war, Bielski paints an entirely amicable portrait of early relations between Jewish and Polish partisans.[28] According to Nechama Tec, the author of a monograph about the Bielski partisans, Bielski maintained a friendship with the local Home Army commander Lieutenant Kacper (or Kasper) Miłaszewski as late as August 1943.[29] (Miłaszewski's unit was orginally known as the Polish Partisan Detachment (*Polski Oddział Partyzancki*) or the Kościuszko detachment, and was later transformed into the Stołpce battalion (*Batalion Stołpecki*) of the Home Army.) Anatol Wertheim, who served as aide-de-camp for Semen (Semion, Shimon, Shalom) Zorin, a Soviet-Jewish partisan leader in the same area, also describes relations with the Polish partisans until mid–1943 as "friendly."[30] This should not be surprising given the attitude of Lieutenant Miłaszewski (*nom de guerre* "Lewald"), as described by one of his own fighters:

> In 1941 Lieutenant Kacper Milaszewski [Miłaszewski], known by the pseudonym Lewald, began to organize the Union for Armed Struggle (later the Home Army) in the county of Stolpce [Stołpce] (strictly speaking, the communities in the region included Derewno [or Derewna], Naliboki, Rubieżewicz [Rubieżewicze], and part of Iwieniec). He selected me as his adjutant, in which capacity I served during the organization and early operations of partisan units under his command in the Nalibocki [Naliboki] Forest (the Seventy-eighth Infantry Regiment and the Twenty-Seventh Cavalry Regiment).
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> When we had our framework ready, we began to penetrate German offices and place our own people there, with the aim of gathering and transmitting news about German actions. The most valuable information was transmitted by Hipolit Samson and J. [Jan] Borysewicz [*nom de guerre* "Krysia"], both of whom the Germans later put to death. They told us which ghettos would be exterminated and when it would occur.
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> In the spring of 1942, we learned that the Germans planned to liquidate the Rubieżewicz ghetto in June. Lieutenant Milaszewski immediately sent me to Rubieżewicz to relay this information to the

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[28] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 365–66.

[29] Tec, *Defiance,* 114–16.

[30] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 86 (1988): 96–162, at p. 150. Wertheim, who hailed from Warsaw, wrote in glowing terms about the warm and hospitable reception he and two other Jews received at the Polish partisan base in Derewno (Derewna) under Lieutenant Miłaszewski's command. Ibid., 137–40. Wertheim served as aide-de-camp for the Soviet-Jewish partisan leader Semen Zorin. Zorin, who hailed from Minsk, fought as a Communist partisan in the Civil War in 1919–1920. When the Germans occupied Minsk, Zorin lived in the ghetto. In late 1941, he escaped to the forests in the Staroe Selo area, about 30 kilometres southwest of Minsk, where he joined up with a newly formed group of Communist partisans. Because of constant clashes between the Jewish and non-Jewish members, Zorin formed a detachment made up of Jewish escapees from the ghettos (Unit 106 of the Iwieniec Regional Central Command), commonly known as the Zorin unit. After successive attacks by the Germans and Belorussian police, the unit transferred its base to Naliboki forest, in proximity to the bases of many Soviet partisan groups. Anatol, the leader of a Jewish partisan unit which also maintained a Jewish civilian or "family" camp housing up to 800 persons. About 100 men served in the combat unit whose principal activity was foraging for food and other provisions among the local population. In January 1944, the partisan command allotted them four villages in which to carry out "economic actions," but they often went to raid other villages. See Shalom Cholawski, "Zorin, Shalom," in Israel Gutman, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1990), vol. 4: 1739–40; Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 299–305. It is not clear whether members of the Zorin unit took part in the massacre of some 130 Poles in the village of Naliboki in May 1943.

Jews. The Rubieżewicz ghetto was not enclosed by a wall or barbed wire, allowing the Jews to walk freely around the town. They depended on the generosity of the Polish people for their food; the Germans did not give them any means of living. My first conversation was with Rabbi Pentelnik from Derewno and his daughter, Nieszka, a former schoolmate. The rabbi advised me to talk with Bratkowski, the former commander of a unit, called Talbot [Tarbut?], from Derewno. Upon my return, Lieutenant Milaszewski was clearly pleased with my trip to Rubieżewicz.

After some time, we received information about a plan to liquidate the ghetto in Stolpce. The ghetto was wired and well guarded. We knew that the Germans used ghetto labor for slaking lime and working in the sawmill in Nowe Swierznie [Świerżeń Nowy], two and one-half kilometers beyond Stolpce. I was sent to the quarry under the pretext of buying lime. I met Jewish acquaintances and relayed the news of what awaited them.

As they filled the bags with lime, three Jewish women asked me if I could take them along with the lime and carry them to the woods. I replied that we would try it and asked them [to] sit in the wagon. At the gate, the German police stopped us and sharply asked me where I was taking the women. I replied through an interpreter that the Jews had asked me to carry them to Stolpce, where they would pick up certain items from their abandoned houses and then return to work. The Germans conferred with each other. Eventually a German sergeant approached me. He expressed agreement, on condition that I hand over my German identity card, which would be returned to me after I brought the Jews back to work. … I readily handed over my identity card because that was not my real name on it anyway. We moved away as the Germans waved us on. …

After I crossed the railroad track, I did not travel over the bridge by way of Stolpce. I chose a longer road on the left side of the Niemen. After one kilometer, I threw the bags of lime into the ditch, and away I went with my Jewish charges. (This incident would be confirmed by a former resident of the Stolpce ghetto Mrs. R.N., who now lives in Manchester, England.)

In July and August 1943, action against the partisans began in the Nalibocki Forest. Several German divisions, aided by thousands of police, participated in the operation, code-named Herman [Hermann]. At this time our detachment numbered about 650 men under the command of Lieutenants Milaszewski and W. [Walenty] Parchimowicz. For several days we did not fight due to the overwhelming strength of the Germans, who drove us deeper into the forest. In the forest, we happened upon a Jewish partisan camp that the Germans had not yet reached. We had a cordial meeting. We had no provisions, but they had spare food. … They shared what they had with us. … We learned that their detachment numbered a few hundred, primarily from the ghettos in Rubieżewicz and Stolpce. I recognized many of my colleagues among them.[31]

Wiktor Noskowski, who hails from Ejszyszki, also recounts some of the forms of assistance that Jews received from Poles and the Home Army in this area:

During the German occupation I was a soldier of the Home Army and in its ranks I came into contact with partisans of Jewish origin: a medic whose *nom de guerre* was "Roch" (I don't remember his surname) and Aleksander Lewin (Lewiński), whose *nom de guerre* was

[31] Account of Henryk Werakso in Lukas, *Out of the Inferno,* 175–77. The testimony of Kacper Miłaszewski is found in Eugeniusz Wawrzyniak, ed., *Ze wspomnień żołnierzy AK Okręgu Nowogródek* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, 1988), 191–216.

"Wrzos." (After the war, Lewiński was a professor of medicine and rector of the Medical Academy in Gdańsk.) …

Of the examples of assistance to Jews in hiding known to me, the greatest helpfulness was shown by the Korkuć, Swieczko, Myślicki, Wołyniec, Misiuro, Tumielewicz, Sakowicz and Kiersnowski families, not to mention Rev. Gedymin [Giedymin] Pilecki and even the commander of the local Home Army battalion, Captain Stanisław Truszkowski, who sheltered a girl of the same age as his daughter, passing her off as his own child.

… My schoolmate Estera Bielicka spent the entire [German] occupation with the Myślicki family in Matejkany [also spelled Motejkany] in plain sight of all of the residents of this village. Not only did the villagers know about her, but she was also seen at church services in town [i.e., Ejszyszki] and no one from among the parishioners betrayed her.

Rev. Gedymin Pilecki, the head chaplain of the Nowogródek district of the Home Army, sheltered two Jewish women from Wilno in his rectory in Hermaniszki]. He also administered the sacrament of baptism to Dawid Lipnicki, changing his name to Andrzej, and placed him with his sexton Wacław Misiuro. (When the Red Army arrived in July 1944, Dawid Lipnicki left his hideout with the Tumielewicz family and joined the Soviet army. Two years later, Misiuro met him in Białystok. Lipnicki was riding in a convoy of automobiles dressed in Soviet uniform. He recognized Misiuro, his first protector, and immediately denounced him to the NKVD as a Home Army member.) Rev. Pilecki also helped the Wilno ghetto with shipments of food. Jews from Wilno, who travelled in trucks accompanied by authentic German gendarmes who had been bribed to act as camouflage for the convoy, were brought by Misiuro to the rectory in Hermaniszki. There, they picked up tons of food procured by Rev. Pilecki.

The Kiersnowskis, owners of an estate in Podweryszki, helped the Jews in the small neighbouring town of Bieniakonie. During the harvest of the crops they snuck loaded wagons into the town where starving Jews descended on them. The Jews appreciated this help as was shown a year later when one of the Jews from Bieniakonie who survived, now a Soviet partisan, successfully stood up for Kiersnowski when he was seized from his home by the Soviet partisans, though he was unable to prevent them from taking Kiersnowski's boots.

The mayor of Raduń, Bolesław Kuligowski, issued fictitious identity documents (*Personalausweis*) to Jewish refugees, thus enabling them to remain legally in their chosen place and to obtain employment. I personally met two such Jews: Wirszubski, an interpreter in the local Kreisverwaltung [district administration], and Artur Rozental, a mechanic in the estate of Horodenka. …

After the independent state of Lithuania was incorporated into the Soviet Union and the diplomatic posts of the neutral countries were shut down in Kaunas, the Polish underground extended a helping hand to those Jews who did not manage to leave for countries outside Europe and found themselves entrapped. In the underground certification workshops of the command of the Wilno district of the Home Army, a factory producing false passports and imitation visa stamps was established under the direction of Michał and Romuald Warakomski and Stanisław Kiałka. These documents helped thousands of Jews to leave for Japan and Curaçao.

> One should also note the marriages, albeit infrequent, between Poles and Jews. … For example, Franciszek Kudelski[32] married a Jewess by the name of Kazia and both of them held responsible positions in the Home Army in the Baranowicze district. …
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> Chaim Długin, the leader of the Judenrat in Werenowo, ignored the proposal put forward by the local command of the Home Army, represented by Wacław Domański ("Korweta") and Bronisław Hajdul ("Wyrwa"), to seize the poorly guarded storehouse of Soviet arms and eventually to undertake joint partisan warfare. … Długin decided to reject this plan because, as he stated, he was afraid it would provoke the Germans to take unanticipated repressive measures. In view of his stance, the prospect of organizing armed resistance was impossible against the will of the Jews. It was agreed only that contacts would be maintained and information exchanged through a designated liaison, the elegant Chana Abramicka. …
>
> It is worth recalling the burning of the farm and the shooting of the five-member Wołyniec family in the village of Romaszkańce near Werenowo, together with the three fugitives from the ghetto whom they sheltered. Two Jewish women from Wilno were found on the property of the Sakowicz family in the remote settlement of Władysławów. The owner of the farm, who was the mayor of Werenowo, managed to escape death because he was absent. He was unable to return to his home until the end of the war. In Raduń, the cover of the interpreter Wirszubski, a Jew, was found out. Fortunately, he was rescued by the Home Army.[33]

Jewish sources also confirm that relations with the Polish underground in this region were generally favourable in the early period.

> At a certain stage, contacts were also established between some ghettos and the Polish underground. Such a link was formed in Wiszniewo [Wiszniew]. Members of the Polish underground sent information, received over the radio, to the ghetto; they also sent in underground newspapers and leaflets. There was talk of bringing explosives and arms into the ghetto, but there is

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[32] During the German occupation, Alina Culk, who fled from Łódź, worked in a medical laboratory in Baranowicze which was supervised by Franciszek Kudelski, a Pole, who was a member of the Home Army. (Her testimony states Kudelski's wife and children had been deported by the Soviets.) After her escape from a German round-up in the ghetto, Culk turned to Kudelski for assistance and received help from him and a number of other Poles. She joined a Home Army unit near Lida posing as a Pole. Understandably, she found the partisans to be anti-Soviet. Although Culk claims that the Home Army killed everyone suspected of being a Jew, she provides no such evidence. After her identity was discovered, she was brought before a local commander who expressed concerns about her possibly being pro-Soviet because of the conduct of Jews under the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland. Nonetheless, she was allowed to remain in the unit. See the testimony of Alina Colle [Culk], dated December 15, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/4009, reproduced in Jerzy Diatłowicki and Janusz Roszkowski, eds., *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945: Opór i walka z faszyzmem w latach 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny im. E. Ringelbluma and Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie Światowej, 2010), vol. 2, 74–80. On Franciszek Kudelski's Home Army connections, where he served as an intelligence and liaison officer, see Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 311, 312, 314, 319.

[33] Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Myśl Polska,* July 20–27, 1997. Noskowski's account is reproduced in Chodakiewicz, *Ejszyszki: Kulisy zajść w Ejszyszkach,* vol. 1, 181–93, and Chodakiewicz, *Ejszyszki: Pogrom, którego nie było,* 159–75.

no proof that this ever happened.[34]

> It was December 16 [1941]. … Late that night the local Chief of Police, a [Pole] friendly to the Jews, had warned the Judenrat [in Jody, a small town near Brasław] of impending doom. …
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> A Polish forester took a group of Jody Jews, twelve families in all, to a secluded swamp area where there was a well-concealed sandy hill. This is where they set up their camp. …
>
> Dave and I decided to find more weapons and by chance we stumbled upon the perfect contact. His name was Vanka [Wańka?] and he was a Polish ultra-nationalist from Mlynarovo [Młynarowo]. We did not know it at the time, but he was also the commander of the local Polish underground and in charge of a large collection of weapons. Vanka was an important source of information and shelter. He had a concealed shortwave radio which gave us news through the BBC. … His house was also very close to Jody and we always knew that in emergencies he would provide a secure hiding place … He also had friends among the local police who worked with the Germans. Through them, Vanka knew much about German activities in our area.
>
> We were soon able to purchase our first weapon from Vanka … Vanka still supplied us with weapons and with information he received from his friends in the Polish and Belorussian Police.[35]

Likewise, at least in the initial stages, the presence of the Home Army was viewed as beneficial by many Jews in hiding in various parts of Poland. A Jew from the Siedlce area attests to this:

> That the Jews succeeded in surviving in the forest was also in some measure due to the Polish underground. This organization became progressively more active, and, by the summer of 1943, it had developed into a full-fledged, partisan outfit. …

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[34] Shalom Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 139. With regard to the connections with the Polish underground, Cheina Rabinovich offers the following elucidation: "In Vishnevo [Wiszniew] and nearby areas … in the forest there were Polish youths who started underground activities against the Germans. They communicated with the Judenrat in the ghetto. They would come secretly and bring news from the radio, ans sometimes even some pamphlets from the Polish underground. They even talked with us about weapons that they would bring to the ghetto. Everyone discussed the idea that on the day of annihilation (we all realized that such a day will soon arrive) we should have explosives and to use them so that some might be able to escape to the forest. After some long discussion, *a decision was made to nix the plan*, since everyone was too scared and maybe still had some hope that they would somehow survive." See Cheina Rabinovich, "Vishnevo during the Second World War," in Hayyim Abramson, ed., *Vishneva, ke-fi she-hayetah ve-enenah od: Sefer zikaron* (Tel Aviv: Wiszniew Society in Israel, 1972), 107 ff.; English translation: *Wiszniew, As It Was and Is No More: Memorial Book,* posted on the Internet at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/vishnevo/vishnevo.html> Nothwithstanding such evidence, Holocaust memoirs contend that, already in late 1941 and throughout 1942, Home Army partisan units roamed the countryside looking for Jews and Communists to murder, which is long before Home Army partisan units became active in the vicinity of Naliboki forest. See the memoir of Noah Podberesky from Wiszniew: Samuel Podberesky, *Never the Last Road* (College Station, Texas: Virtualbookworm.com, 2003), 37, 50, 51.

[35] Peter Silverman, David Smuschkowitz, and Peter Smuszkowicz, *From Victims to Victors* (Concord, Ontario: The Canadian Society For Yad Vashem, 1992), 79, 107–108, 97, 129. Throughout this area the local police was infiltrated by the Polish underground. The chief of police of the Nowa Mysz district, Henryk Zaprucki, was at the same time a commander in the Home Army. See Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–41* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 2000), 143. The chief of police in Raduń, Franciszek Ługowski, who provided considerable assistance to Jews, also maintained connections with the Polish underground and eventually abandoned his post. See Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 25–26, 263; Testimony of Beniamin Rogowski, March 14, 1965, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/2820.

> As a result of the AK [Armia Krajowa] activities, the Germans, if they could, avoided venturing into the countryside. Gone were the days when a few of them would take off into the villages to have extracurricular fun with requisitions and casual killings. The underground was systematically assassinating all their collaborators and spies, except those who also served the underground. They had killed the Arbeitsamt in Losice [Łosice] as well as the Commandant of the Polish police. Since all collaborators and German agents were inevitably Jewbaiters, these assassinations often seemed to the peasants an admonition not to harm Jews. This impression was strengthened by the illegal pamphlets distributed throughout the country in which the official position of the AK was to help the remaining Jews by all possible means. So the underground protected us to some degree, not only from the Germans but also from the Poles. And, indeed, this was the quietest and safest period in our clandestine life.[36]

Obviously, something other than "endemic" Polish anti-Semitism played an important part in the subsequent deterioration of relations with the Soviet and Jewish partisans. What went wrong? Understanding the complexities of the situation in northeastern Poland is a key to a proper assessment of relations between the Polish underground and the Jews throughout the country. This book is not intended to be an exhaustive treatment of the topic of Polish-Jewish relations, nor is its primary focus the Polish Home Army. Rather our intention is to dispel the popular, but undeserved, image of bloodthirsty Polish partisans, who were allegedly eager to collaborate with Germans against the heroic Soviet and Jewish partisans and were preoccupied with hunting down Jews. Although no one can deny that Jews in hiding were in a difficult, precarious and, indeed, desperate situation, and that their fate did not always elicit the sympathy of the local population, the simplistic and distorted picture pushed in Holocaust literature of Polish partisans waging a war against the Jews is far from accurate. Nor is it borne out by a careful reading of Jewish writings and recently revealed Communist documents.

[36] Oscar Pinkus, *The House of Ashes*, Revised edition (Schenectady, New York: Union College Press, 1990), 213–14.

2. An Overview of Polish-Soviet Wartime Relations

As historian Norman Davies points out, Poles and other peoples in East-Central Europe were in a hopeless predicament, caught in the same double bind, overtaken not just by one occupation, but by two:

> Eastern Europe lay astride the battleground of the two greatest tyrannies which the world has yet seen; and the full horror of its fate can never be comprehended unless events on either side of the dividing line are related to each other.[37]

Conditions throughout occupied Poland varied greatly. In some areas, especially in northeastern Poland, the situation was particularly volatile. The Soviet Union invaded and annexed the region in September 1939, in violation of a treaty it had signed with Poland in Riga in 1921 and the Polish-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1932. The Soviet occupation, which lasted until July 1941, targeted first and foremost the Polish population—officials, officers and soldiers, as well as the nascent underground, but also consumed tens of thousands of Polish civilians, especially members of the elite.[38] Polish-Belorussian relations had also taken a turn for the worse with the murder of about two thousand Poles by radical and especially Communist-inspired factions among the Belorussian (or Byelorussian, sometimes referred to as White Russian) population in September 1939.[39] As could be expected, resentment over the Soviet occupation of 1939–1941 lingered after the arrival of the German occupiers, and engendered suspicion about all subsequent Soviet actions and designs. The central staff of the Soviet partisan movement was established on May 30, 1942. Headed by Panteleimon Ponomarenko, it gradually took command of the separate partisan units that had sprung up in the area. The partisan movement was subordinated to the Communist Central Committee and not to the Soviet army. Its leadership was dominated by NKVD officers. The Soviet army and NKVD had their own intelligence units in the forests. An increasingly formidable and dense network of Soviet partisans, which became heavily infiltrated by NKVD agents, was viewed as a vehicle for the furtherance of Soviet interests and reincorporation of Poland's Eastern

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[37] Norman Davies, "Poles and Jews: An Exchange," *New York Review of Books,* April 9, 1987.

[38] As mentioned earlier, according to Soviet statistics, between October 1939 and June 1941, the Soviets had deported more than 120,000 people from prewar Polish territories incorporated into the Belorussian SSR, of whom around 90,000 were ethnic Poles and 23,000 Jews. The vast majority of the Jewish deportees, however, were non-natives who had fled to this area in 1939 in advance of the invading German army; the reason for their deportation was their reluctance to accept Soviet citizenship after being offered the possibility of returning to their homes in the German zone in the early part of 1940. It appears that about half of the Jews who had taken refuge in the Soviet zone did accept Soviet citizenship and thus avoided deportation; the remainder were, much to their surprise, rounded up for deportation as unsure elements. See Eugeniusz Mironowicz, "Zmiany struktury narodowościowej w zachodnich obwodach Białorusi w latach 1939–1941," *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne,* vol. 20 (Białystok: Białoruskie Towarzystwo Historyczne, 2003): 194–202.

[39] These abuses targeted primarily Polish authorities, the military, and landlords on the eve of and during the early weeks of the Soviet invasion of Poland in mid–September and early October 1939. Some 2,000 Poles were killed by their Belorusian neighbours, who were inspired to a large degree by Communist agitators and whose misdeeds were applauded by the Soviet authorities (such as General Ponomarenko). See Michał Gnatowski, *W radzieckich okowach: Studium o agresji 17 września 1939 r. i o radzieckiej polityce w regionie łomżyńskim w latach 1939–1941* (Łomża: Łomżyńskie Towarzystwo Naukowe im. Wagów, 1997), 69; Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim*.

Borderlands into the Soviet Union.[40] It was apparent to most Poles that another clash with the Soviets was inevitable. These fears would prove to be correct.

The only non-Soviet underground military organization operating in this area was the Polish Home Army, who answered to the Polish government in exile in London. Northeastern Poland, comprising the prewar provinces (*województwa*) of Wilno, Nowogródek, Białystok and Polesie, formed the nucleus of the Obszar Białystok (Obszar II) (Białystok Area) of the Home Army, which was comprised of four districts (*okręgi*)—Wilno, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Aleksander Krzyżanowski ("Wilk"); Nowogródek, headed by by Lieutenant-Colonel Janusz Szlaski ("Prawdzic"); Białystok, headed by Lieutenant-Colonel Władysław Liniarski ("Mścisław"); and Polesie—corresponding to the boundaries of the prewar provinces. The Home Army districts were under orders to cooperate with the Soviet underground and not to engage in combat with Soviet partisans.[41] Contrary to claims found in Holocaust literature, there were no other Polish partisan

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[40] According to Soviet sources, in July 1944, in the combined districts of Baranowicze, Białystok, Brześć, Pińsk and Wilejka, there were 8 partisan groupings or concentrations, 69 brigades and 171 independent detachments with more than 63,500 partisans. In addition, they were supported by 226 NKVD groups and units, counting more than 3,100 persons, which were involved in diversionary and intelligence operations directed at the "enemies" of Soviet authority. See Michał Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Marzena Liedke, Joanna Sadowska and Jan Tyrkowski, eds., *Granice i pogranicza: Historia codzienności i doświadczeń* (Białystok: Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 1999), vol. 2, 180–81. The largest concentration of Soviet partisans was located in the Baranowicze district and was under the command of Vasilii Chernyshev (or Chernyshov), who was known as Platon. It was divided into four zones or regions (Iwieniec, Szczuczyn, Lida and Stołpce) and, at its peak, consisted of 22 brigades and five independent detachments totalling about 17,500 people. There was also a partisan concentration in the southern zone of that same district (Baranowicze) consisting of three brigades and four independent detachments and counting 2,400 people. In the Wilejka district, to the north, there was an operational military division headed by Colonel Fedor Markov, which consisted of 18 brigades and five independent detachments. Their combined strength was 12,000 people. In addition, it had two reconnaissance and diversionary detachments counting 600 people. The weakest district was Białystok, where there were five brigades and seven independent detachments, totalling 7,000 people. These were located mainly in the Lipiczany and Różana forests. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 11. Historian Michał Gnatowski points out that Soviet efforts to penetrate the Polish underground were largely unsuccessful because of a lack of support for the Soviets on the local Polish population. See Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 188.

[41] In the summer of 1943 the leadership of the Wilno and Nowogródek districts of the Home Army received instructions from the Home Army High Command to conduct discussions and to cooperate with Soviet partisans based on principles of mutual respect including respect for Poland's territorial integrity. (In international law, Poland's Eastern territories continued to be an integral part of the Polish state.) See Tadeusz Pełczyński, Halina Czarnocka, Józef Garliński, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, and Włodzimierz Otocki, eds., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 3: *Kwiecień 1943–lipiec 1944* (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1976), 94; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 156; Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 186.

formations in this area such as the right-wing National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*—NSZ),[42] nor was there any significant Belorussian national resistance movement to German or Soviet rule.[43] There were, however, various Belorussian and Lithuanian formations, both military and police, in the service of

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[42] Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky, for example, claims baselessly that "the *Armia Krajowa* and the *Narodowy [sic] Siły Zbrojne* … In the summer and spring of 1943 [sic], they victimized Jews in the forests of Lipichany [Lipiczany], Naliboki, Rudensk, Naroch [Narocz] and Bryansk." The Home Army was just becoming active in the spring and summer of 1943, though certainly not in Rudensk and Bryansk (areas located in Soviet Belorussia), and was still on good terms with the Soviet partisans. Smilovitsky is correct in saying that the Home Army came to view the Jews as "pro-Soviet elements," which they by and large were, but that came later, after the Jews joined in Soviet assaults on Polish civilians (e.g., Naliboki in May 1943) and partisans (e.g., Lake Narocz in August 1943). See Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 22 (also 14), 138. Smilovitsky's treatment of Polish-Jewish relations, found at pp. 129–46, is very selective in its use of facts, poorly researched in terms of Polish sources, and decidedly pro-Jewish and even pro-Soviet. The NSZ did not field partisan units in this region, though, beginning in 1943, it briefly maintained a skeletal district command. Its activities were most likely limited to Wilno and perhaps a few other towns. However, as early as fall 1939, the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*) organized its clandestine structures in the area, including the *Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa* (National Military Organization). The NOW organized no permanent guerrilla units, although occasionally it sent out its special task forces, mobilized for the occasion, to carry out various anti-German, anti-Soviet, and anti-bandit operations. The NOW suffered incredible losses during the great German pacification in the vicinity of Naliboki forest in summer 1943 and it members were later co-opted into the AK. See Kazimierz Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1943* (Warsaw: Pax, 1993), 380. An exceptional case was the *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe* (Shock Cadre Battalions) of the *Konfederacja Narodu* (National Confederation), a small unit of about 80 men headed by the radical ONR-Falanga leader Bolesław Piasecki, which moved into the Lida area—in the vicinity of the town of Iwie (Iwje)—from Białystok in October 1943, and was incorporated into the Home Army. Piasecki's group left the Nowogródek area and joined up with the Wilno District of the Home Army in protest of the decision of some commanders of beleaguered AK units to accept weapons from the Germans after the Soviet assault in December 1943. See Jan Erdman, *Droga do Ostrej Bramy* (London: Odnowa, 1984), 240–41; Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1943,* passim; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowgródzkiej,* 120; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 39–40; Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, "Konfederacja Narodu," in *Encyklopedia "Białych Plam"* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2002), vol. 9, 311–12. The Shock Cadre Battalions were accused of killing one of their officers allegedly because of his Jewish origin. It has been established, however, that the officer in question turned betrayer after being blackmailed by the Germans, who had arrested his wife; he was thus liquidated as a Gestapo collaborator. See Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1943,* 351. According to an unverified and undocumented account, Piasecki's unit was also accused of executing some Jews who allegedly confessed to being sent by the Germans to ferret out partisans. Piasecki put the blame for that deed on his chief of staff, Wojciech Kętrzyński "Wołkowyski", whose mother was of Jewish origin. See Jacek Wilamowski, *Pętla zdrady: Konspiracja–wróg–polityka: Za kulisami Polski Podziemnej 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Agencja Wydawnicza CB Andrzej Zasieczny, 2003), 73. After the war, Piasecki's 16-year-old son was kidnapped and murdered in Warsaw by Jewish avengers; the circumstances of that event are described later on.

[43] Historian Leonid Rein, relying on a Belorussian source—Aleh Dziarnovich, ed., *Antysavetskiia rukhi u Belarusi 1944 –1945: Davednik* (Minsk, Arkhiu Nainoushae Historyi, 1999), 120, states that there was a network of Belorussian national partisan detachments, united with the Belorussian People's Partisan Movement (*Belaruskaia Narodnaia Partyzantka, BNP*), that fought primarily against Soviet and Polish partisans. However, no details of their strength and activities are provided. See Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 280. Belorussian historian Zakhar Shybeka also mentions an underground organization, perhaps the same one—the Belorussian Nationalist Party—which was allegedly opposed to both the Nazis and Soviets. See Zachar Szybieka [Zakhar Shybeka], *Historia Białorusi 1795*–2000 (Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2002). However, as historian Eugeniusz Mironowicz points out, that claim has not been substantiated. See Eugeniusz Mironowicz, "Ruch partyzancki na Białorusi w historiografii białoruskiej i polskiej," in Krzysztof Buchowski and Wojciech Śleszyński, eds., *Historycy polscy, litewscy i białoruscy wobec problemów XX wieku: Historiografia polska, litewska i białoruska po 1989 roku* (Białystok: Instytut Historii Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, Katedra Ekonomii i Nauk Społecznych Politechniki Białostockiej, Archiwum Państwowe w Białymstoku, Sekcja Dziejów Ziem Północno-Wschodnich Dawnej Rzeczyspospolitej Polskiego Towarzystwa Historycznego, and Prymat, 2003), 66.

the Germans.[44] In April 1943, some 30,000 members of the Belorussian auxiliary police were pitted against some 75,000 Soviet partisans, engaged in open warfare.[45] Many Belorussian nationalists had sided with the Germans in the vain hope that they might one day allow the Belorussians to establish their own state or protectorate. The Soviets executed pro-German Belorussian administrative officials and social and political activists by the hundreds, as well as thousands of peasants who put up "resistance."[46] While many Belorussians fought in the ranks of the Soviet partisans, that force could hardly be regarded as a national Belorussian underground, as it answered only to the Soviet government. To round out this picture we should mention other lesser players on the scene: Cossacks in the German army,[47] the so-called Russian National Liberation Army (RONA), and Ukrainian and Latvian police and SS divisions. A Lithuanian anti-partisan known as the Litauische Sonderverbände (*Lietuvos Vietinė Rinktinė*), under the command of General Povilas Plechavičius, which was entirely under German control, was also active in the Wilno

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[44] On the topic of Belorussian collaboration see Antonio Muñoz and Oleg Romanko, *Hitler's White Russians: Collaboration, Extermination and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Byelorussia, 1941–1944* (Bayside, New York: Europa Books, 2003). The following "native" units were stationed in Belorussia in January 1944: 46th White Russian Battalion (Minsk), 47th White Russian Battalion (Minsk), 48th White Russian Battalion (Słonim), 49th White Russian Battalion (Minsk), 60th White Russian Battalion (Minsk), 64th White Russian Battalion (Głębokie), 65th White Russian Battalion (Nowogródek), 66th White Russian Battalion (Slutsk or Słuck in Polish), 67th White Russian Battalion (Wilejka), 69th White Russian Battalion. For a description of the activities of the pro-German Belorussian forces under the command of Boris Ragula (Borys Rahula), see Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 233–34. Ragula (Rahula) was the Nowogródek district leader of the so-called Belorussian Free Defence Corps. See Turonek, *Białoruś pod okupacją niemiecką,* 143. Ragula (Rahula) also directed actions against Polish activists in his capacity as the local leader of the Belorussian National Self-Help and adviser of the Gebietskommissar in Nowogródek. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 25, 40, 295. There were also many Russian, Ukrainian, Estonian, Muslim, Cossack, and Caucasian formations active in this area, but no Polish ones. See Leonid Rein, "*Untermenschen* in SS Uniforms: 30th Waffen-Grenadier Division of Waffen SS," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2 (April 2007): 329–45; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 364–77. On Lithuanian formations in this area, see Martin Dean, "Lithuanian Participation in the Mass Murder of Jews in Belarus and Ukraine, 1941–44," in Nikžentaitis, Schreiner, and Staliūnas, *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews,* 285–96. On Lithuanian collaboration generally see Knut Stang, *Kollaboration und Massenmord: Die litauische Hilfspolizei, das Rollkommando Hamann und die Ermordung der litauischen Juden* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 156–71; Christoph Dieckmann, "The Role of the Lithuanians in the Holocaust," in Beate Kosmala and Feliks Tych, eds., *Facing the Nazi Genocide: Non-Jews and Jews in Europe* (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 149–68; Nikžentaitis, et al., *The Vanished World of Lithuanian Jews,* 175–203, 205–21.

[45] Szybieka, *Historia Białorusi 1795–2000,* 352.

[46] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 141.

[47] Samuel J. Newland, *Cossacks in the German Army, 1941–1945* (London and Portland, Oregon: Frank Cass, 1991), 127–37.

region in 1944 and targeted both the Polish underground and its supporters.[48] There was no armed Lithuanian resistance to the Germans, and therefore German retaliations rarely targeted Lithuanians.[49] The Lithuanian partisan movement, whose base of operation did not extend east of Wilno, did not emerge until the arrival of the Red Army in the summer of 1944 and fought the Soviets.[50]

Relations between the Polish underground and the Belorussian population became increasingly strained largely because of the support the Germans encouraged and received from Belorussian nationalists. Due to

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[48] The most dramatic confrontation between the Polish underground and the pro-German Lithuanian forces ensued after a series of pacifications undertaken by General Plechavičius's formation in Gudełki (Gudele), Pawłowo, Adamowszczyzna, and Sieńkowszczyzna, in which dozens of Polish civilians were killed. In retaliation for murdering 38 Poles in Glinciszki on June 20, 1944, the Home Army decided to strike at the Lithuanian garrison in Podbrzezie which was responsible for the massacre. Since the 258th Lithuanian Self-Defence Battalion had been removed from the garrison, a Home Army unit instead attacked the Lithuanian village of Dubingiai (Dubinki in Polish), which was believed to have had provided recruits for the German-sponsored formations, and executed 27 inhabitants on June 21, 1941. However, a few of the victims turned out to be ethnic Poles. This harsh—and exceptional—reprisal was contrary to instructions from the regional command of the Home Army but had the desired effect of curtailing further Lithuanian pacifications. See Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 193, 196, 235–36, 241–42, 246–47; Jarosław Wołkonowski, "Starcie polsko-litewskie," *Karta*, no. 32 (2001): 64–89; Robert Daniłowicz, "Wojna domowa," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), October 13, 2007; Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach,* 239–42; Paweł Rokicki, *Glinciszki i Dubinki: Zbrodnie wojenne na Wileńszczyźnie w połowie 1944 roku i ich konsekwencje we współczesnych relacjach polsko-litewskich* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej and Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2015). The Germans eventually demobilized Plechavičius's formation for reportedly, among other charges, terrorizing, robbing and plundering the local population. See Rimantas Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* Report submitted to the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation in Lithuania (Vilnius, 2003), 64, 92–93, also published in Christoph Dieckmann, Vytautas Toleikis; and Rimantas Zizas, *Karo belaisvių ir civilių gyventojų žudynės Lietuvoje 1941 –1944 / Murders of Prisoners of War and of Civilian Population in Lithuania, 1941–1944* (Vilnius: Margi raštai, 2005). (Zizas confuses the chronology of "reprisals" and the dates of the assaults on Glinciszki and Dubingiai.) In 1945, the Home Army and Lithuanain partisans reached an agreement in Olkieniki to cease mutual fighting and to provide information to one another about the activities of the Soviet forces. See Paweł Kalisz, "Litewskie podziemie na Suwalszczyźnie do 1950 r.," in Jarosław Syrnyk, ed., *Aparat bezpieczeństwa Polski Ludowej wobec mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych oraz cudzoziemców* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009).

[49] As pointed out by Lithuanian historian Rimantas Zizas, proportionately Lithuanians suffered fewer casualties than any other national group under German occupation. Only a few thousand ethnic Lithuanians, out of a population of almost two million, were killed, a toll that includes 500 men who had enlisted for German-sponsored battalions. At least ten of those battalions took part in operations directed against Jews. On the other hand,

> Massive repressions and various attacks were executed against the Polish anti-Nazi underground and its members … In general, the policy of the Nazi occupiers (and of the local Lithuanian autonomous administration) toward the Poles was incomparably harsher than toward Lithuanians. Over the entire course of the Nazi occupation of Lithuania, the Polish intelligentsia, clerics, military and others were terrorised and annihilated. As seen from data presented by Polish historian M. Wardzynska [Maria Wardzyńska, *Sytuacja ludności polskiej w Generalnym Komisariacie Litwy, czerwiec 1941–lipiec 1944* (Warsaw: Mako, 1993)], more than 1000 Poles may have been killed during various massive punitive operations and about 7000 Poles were deported from the Vilnius [Wilno] area for slave labour in Germany.

See Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* 65, 70–71, 121–23, also published in Dieckmann, et al., *Karo belaisvių ir civilių gyventojų žudynės Lietuvoje 1941–1944 / Murders of Prisoners of War and of Civilian Population in Lithuania, 1941–1944.* According to Polish sources, approximately 15,000 Poles perished at the hands of the Germans and their Lithuanian auxiliaries in the interwar territory of Poland incorporated into the German-occupied Lithuanian state. See Grzegorz Hryciuk, "Represje niemieckie na Kresach II Rzeczypospolitej 1941–1944, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość,* no. 12 (2008): 85.

[50] Arūnas Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance Movement in Lithuania, 1941–1944* (Vilnius: VAGA, 2003). The so-called Supreme Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (*Vyriausias Lietuvos išlaisvinimo komitetas*–VLIK) had little popular support and influence and was entirely destroyed by the Germans in May 1944.

a lack of qualified Belorussians, in areas where there was a large Polish population the Germans drew on the Poles to occupy positions in the local administration and police during the early stages of the occupation. This did not sit well with Belorussian nationalists. From 1942 Poles were largely removed from the police and administrative positions they initially occupied. In any event, denunciations of Poles, and

also of Belorussian Catholics who were regarded as pro-Polish, took on massive proportions.[51] While this resulted in hostilities between German-aligned Belorussian nationalist factions and the Polish underground on the political level, which is sometimes inflatedly referred to as a "full-fledged war," it did not—contrary to the view expressed by some historians—result in "full-scale ethnic cleansings," such as those

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[51] The best treatment of this topic is found in Jerzy Grzybowski's article "Białoruski ruch niepodległościowy wobec Polski i Polaków na ziemiach północno-wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej pod okupacją niemiecką (1941–1944)," *Dzieje Najnowsze,* vol. 43, no. 1 (2011): 76–105. See also Jerzy Grzybowski, *Pogoń między Orłem Białym, Swastyką i Czerwoną Gwiazdą: Białoruski ruch niepodległościowy w latach 1939–1956* (Warsaw: Bel Studio, 2011). Denunciations went both ways, with Poles denouncing Belorussians, especially former Soviet functionaries. However, Poles appear to have suffered the brunt of the fall-out, especially with the implementation of the *Polenaktion* in the summer of 1942 directed against the Polish educated classes, in which Belorussians played a prominent role both as informers and executioners. See Michał Wołłejko, "Obóz zagłady Kołdyczewo i antypolska działalność białoruskich nacjonalistów w latach 1941–1944: Rekonensans badawczy," *Glaukopis: Pismo społeczno-kulturalne,* no. 31 (2014): 83–94; Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Wojna wszystkich ze wszystkimi: Białoruś 1941–1944* (Kraków: Avalon, 2015), 169–70, 172–75. The following citations from Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 138, 200, 303–5, are based on German sources:

> At the beginning of the Nazi occupation, phenomena such as denunciations by Byelorussian nationalists against Catholics in general, and against their priests in particular (both Poles and Catholic Byelorussians), were quite widespread. These accusations resulted in the execution of a number of priests, such as Gliebovicz [Henryk Hlebowicz], who had been entrusted with missionary activities in the Minsk area by the Archbishop of Vilna (Vilnius) [Wilno]. Two Byelorussian Catholic priests, Stanislav Glyakovski [Stanisław Glakowski] and Dionysius [Dionizy] Malec, were also executed in Minsk after denunciations accusing them of pro-Polish activities. The flow of such denouncements did not cease during the entire period of occupation. The head of the local propagandists in the Baranaviči [Baranowicze] area, Bedricky, accused the Catholic Byelorussians of sympathizing with the Poles in hopes of restoring a Polish state, and thought that they "d[id] not deserve to be taken into our political confidence."
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> Byelorussian functionaries accused Polish officials of intending to create a Greater Poland, sabotaging German orders, and discriminating against the Byelorussian population. Often even the deportation of Poles was demanded. In some places, Polish inhabitants were expelled by sending them to Germany as forced labor.
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> The Byelorussian legal mass media were allowed to wage anti-Polish propaganda, so one finds that the Byelorussian-language *Novaja Daroha* (The New Road), published in Bialystok [Białystok], wrote in May 1942 about the "domination" of Poles in various collaborationist bodies: "… Anyplace where there are active Byelorussians these relations are very quickly corrected and justly settled by the German authorities." …
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> In mid-1942 the Germans began an open anti-Polish campaign. A particularly tough position was adopted by Slonim [Słonim] *Gebietskommissar* Erren. In June 1942, a special fine was introduced in the Slonim district, imposed as a penalty for the use of "another language," that is, other than Byelorussian or German. As early as the autumn of 1942, eighty-four members of the Polish intelligentsia were shot by the occupation authorities, and one thousand Poles were ejected from their workplaces and replaced by Byelorussians. In April 1943, the *Gebietskommissar* of Vilejka [Wilejka] Haase thought that "the removal of the Poles from Byelorussia is necessary." The various Byelorussian collaborationist bodies did not hide behind the German authorities in inciting the population against the Poles and in carrying out various anti-Polish measures. An especially active role in this respect was played by bodies such as the BNS [*Belaruskaia Narodnaia Samapomach*— Belorussian Popular Self-Aid Organization], the BCR [*Belaruskaia Tsentralnia Rada*— Belorussian Central Council], and the local self-administration. According to Polish historian Kazimierz Krajewski, the functionaries of the "Byelorussian Popular Self-Aid Organization" compiled lists of the Poles who were to be arrested or executed. The Byelorussian auxiliary police units also participated in the repressive measures against the Poles in various areas of Western Byelorussia. … Poles were also the first "candidates" for deportation to work in Germany. It was, in fact, one of the most "popular" methods implemented by the officials of local self-administration in Byelorussia for eliminating Polish influence.

Rein notes, at p. 148, that the work of the collaborationist Belorussian Popular Self-Aid Organization (*Belaruskaia Narodnaia Samapomach*), where denunciations prevailed among the ranks, "encountered open hostility from the Polish as well as the Byelorussian Catholic population." On the activities of Belorussian Catholic priests in Minsk see Zygmunt Zieliński, ed., *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją 1939–1945: Metropolie wileńska i lwowska, zakony* (Katowice: Unia, 1992), 40. In fact, they were not pro-Polish and hampered the activities of Polish priests. One of the Belorussian priests, Vintsent Hadleuski (Wincenty Godlewski), who was a member of the Belorussian Popular Self-Aid Organization and became a school inspector in Minsk, was executed by the Germans on December 24, 1942.

experienced by the Polish population in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia at the hands of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army.[52]

Unfortunately, there are few objective overviews of this entire complex topic. One worth mentioning is by Polish historian Teresa Prekerowa, who was awarded by Yad Vashem for her rescue activities on behalf of Żegota, the Polish Council for Aid to Jews.[53] Prekerowa notes that when the Jews first started to escape from the ghettos in northeastern Poland (in the latter part of 1941), they encountered only small groups of Soviets, as regular Soviet and Polish partisan units formed only later. Most of the Jewish fugitives would never be accepted by the Soviets, however, because they lacked weapons—a standard precondition for

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[52] Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 98, 306. At p. 305, Rein mentions attacks by Home Army units on Belorussian villages without providing any background information, but does not refer to any of the numerous attacks by Soviet partisans on Polish villages, described later in the text, that occurred in that same area (Lida) around that same time which targeted Polish civilians suspected of supporting the Home Army. The number of Belorussians killed by Poles has been grossly exaggerated in Soviet and Belorussian sources. It was certainly considerably smaller than the number of Belorussians killed by Soviet partisans, not to mention those killed by the Germans. This topic is canvassed extensively in Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 204–9. See also Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, "Stosunki narodowościowe w latach 1939–1948 na obszarze tzw. Zachodniej Białorusi," in Ciesielski, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1931–1948,* 292. Ignoring these findings, Alexander Prusin and Leonid Rein cite Belorussian sources that claim that some 1,200 Belorussians were killed by Home Army units in the Lida area. The former historian at least acknowledges that the attacks targeted pro-German nationalists and their social organizations, whereas the latter historian simply speaks of attacks on villagers. See Prusin, *The Lands Between,* 184; Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 305. These retaliations and counter-relations were not grounded in ethnicity *per se*, as were the killings of Poles by Ukrainain nationalists, which one Jewish eyewitness describes as follows: "Several times, we entered small Polish cottages in Ukrainian territory to find their owners nailed to the wall, spikes through their wrists and feet, throats cut in the most brutal kind of savagery." See Jack Pomerantz and Lyric Wallwork Winik, *Run East: Flight from the Holocaust* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 127. The issue of "ethnic cleansing" has become politicized when it is applied to relations between Poles, Belorussians and Lithuanians, as its extent was rather limited compared to the intensity of inter-ethnic killings in places such as Vojvodina (involving Croatians, Germans, Hungarians and Serbs), Istria (involving Italians, Croatians and Slovenians), and Greece/Chameria (involving Greeks and Cham Albanians), which took the lives of tens of thousands of people. On conditions in those territories see the following entries in Wikipedia: "Istrian Exodus," "Foibe Killings," "Italianization," "Occupation of Vojvodina, 1941–1944," "Hungarian occupation of Bačka and Baranja, 1941–1944," "Communist Purges in Serbia 1944–1945," "Chameria," "Expulsion of Cham Albanians," and "Paramythia Executions."

[53] Teresa Prekerowa's essay, "Wojna i okupacja," appears in Jerzy Tomaszewski, ed., *Najnowsze dzieje Żydów w Polsce —w zarysie (do 1950 roku)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 364–70.

joining any partisan unit.[54] They banded together and eventually, as more Jews—especially women—joined them, they established camps. Reluctant to part with what little money and valuables they had brought with them, in order to survive the Jews had to beg for food or simply took it by force. Initially, farmers were quite willing to share their food with those who asked for it, which is confirmed in many accounts referred to later on. However, as the number of Jews in the forests grew and their demands for food became more aggressive, the attitude of the impoverished villagers began to change. Given the concurrent demands for food quotas imposed by the Germans and the confiscations carried out by Soviet partisans,[55] these onerous burdens from all factions became unbearable. It is not surprising therefore, that those who faced violent robberies turned to the local authorities for protection. By any objective standard, such persons were neither "denouncers" nor "collaborators."

Soviet historiography paints a rather rosy picture of the relationship between the Soviet partisans and the local population—one characterized by mutual friendship and assistance. According to German historian Alexander Brakel, who undertook a detailed study of the predominantly Belorussian Baranowicze region, both German and Polish sources, as well as Soviet field reports, are consistent in painting a picture of a successively radicalizing partisan movement which secured its supplies from the rural population by force

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[54] There are many accounts attesting to this practice among Soviet partisans. Shalom Yoran who escaped from the ghetto in Kurzeniec recalled: "We asked to be accepted into their unit. We were strong young men ready to fight. They replied that they only accepted men with weapons. … Their answer was clear-cut. No one would be accepted without weapons." See Shalom Yoran, *The Defiant: A True Story* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 124. And later: "The angry commissar replied that he made no exceptions. He refused to take anyone without arms …" Ibid., 158. A Jew who escaped from the ghetto in Lachowicze along with seven others recalled: "We began looking for partisans, after four weeks we found the first group of partisans made up of 25 Russians, they did not want to take us, because we did not have any weapons, they told us to get ourselves weapons, then they would take us in." See the testimony of Mendel Szczupak, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/49. See also to the same effect the testimony of Beniamin Rozmaryn, who escaped from the Słonim ghetto, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/3997. Abram Bobrow, who was part of group of Jews who had fled from Pohost Zahorodny, recollects: "Once more, we approached a partisan leader with the hope of being able to fight with his group. Once more, we were turned away for the same reason—no weapons." See Abram Bobrow and Julia Bobrow, as told to Stephen Edward Paper, *Voices from the Forest: The True Story of Abram and Julia Bobrow* (Bloomington, Indiana: 1st Books, 2004), 98. Another Jew recalls a typical reception by a Soviet partisan leader: "Well, do you have a gun? Why didn't you Jews prepare for this beforehand? Why did you let them take you to that mass grave without fighting back? Why didn't you come to us earlier to help fight the Germans?" A Jew in that same detachment, who concealed his identity, counselled him: "They don't know I'm Jewish; it's better this way. They all hate us. You can't trust any of them. You've got to find yourself a gun. If you don't have one, they won't want you. They'll send you packing. … When a *goy* asks to join they don't care; they find a rifle for him somehow. But if you're a Jew, they won't take you without a gun. Some Jews came to them from the ghettoes only the other day, but the chief told them to shove off." See Isaac Aron, *Fallen Leaves: Stories of the Holocaust and the Partisans* (New York: Shengold Publishers, 1981), 40–41. That same account acknowledges that it was also the practice of Soviet partisans to murder and steal weapons from stragglers, especially Jews, encountered in the forests. Ibid., 162. The nascent Polish partisan units in that area generally only accepted those who had weapons. See Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszcz,* 288–89.

[55] Soviet partisans became rapacious and violent plunderers who took food, clothing and personal objects of all sorts, leaving many villages with just a few head of livestock. Assaults and rapes were frequent occurrences during their provision-gathering expeditions known as "*bombiozhki*." Once organized, Soviet partisans were very well fed and their allotment of food was on par with those of regular soldiers. In addition to supplying the needs of the partisans, including many from prewar Soviet territories, provisions confiscated from villagers (such as foodstuffs, livestock, and equipment) were "redistributed" to local residents who supported the Soviet underground and even flown to Russia. Among the worst hoarders of stolen goods were the two large Jewish family camps (Bielski's and Zorin's) in Naliboki forest, and the smaller groups in the forests in the vicinity of Nacza, Lipiczany and Byteń. See Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 186; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 81–87.

of arms. While the central leadership of the Soviet underground attempted, from 1942, to prevent the accompanying violence (assaults, rapes, killings), Soviet partisans could not do without the procurement of provisions and, as their numbers increased, so did the procurement operations. These operations had a devastating impact on the local population. Peasants lived in fear of the partisans, who could burn their houses, brutalize them or even kill them and rape their wives and daughters. The comparatively high food rations of the underground fighters, as compared to that of the impoverished countryside, suggest that considerations for the welfare of the local population were not a high priority for the Soviet leadership. On the ideological front, the Soviet partisans also conducted a violent campaign to surpress non-compliant elements of the civilian population and to eradicate any forms of opposition to future Soviet hegemony in this area. They also provoked German counter-attacks and reprisals from which the civilian population suffered greatly and which resulted in huge numbers of casualties.[56]

> … nothing had a worse impact on relations between civilians and partisans than the procurement policy of the Soviet underground. …
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> In the beginning, when partisan groups were small, providing them with food was relatively straightforward. And even the Germans acknowledged that, at this stage, most villagers were giving food to the partisans voluntarily. And even if they did not, the amount of food the partisans needed was still tolerable for the affected peasants. … But as the underground movement expanded, due to German reprisals, procurement and, probably most importantly, the Germans' forced labour policy, supplying itself with food became increasingly difficult. Procurement operations became regular events and from August 1942 they became almost daily phenomena. Although the Germans tried very hard to protect the villages and state farms in order to secure their own food supply, their forces were much too weak to cope with this challenge. Additionally, as the partisan groups increased in size, so too did their looting. In late July 1942 a detachment of some 50 men took away all the peasants' carriages and eight tons of grain at a village near Turets [Turzec]; on 15 August about 30 partisans forced the inhabitants of the village of Kolki [Kołki] to hand over 20 horses with carriages; and on 3 September 1000 kilograms of rye and 500 kilograms of wheat were stolen from the mill near Obryna. On top of the effects of German procurement policy, peasants were often left without any food at all.
>
> Food procurement was of crucial importance for one other reason too. In order to obtain food, partisans had to enter the villages. Thus, procurement operations brought them into close contact with civilians. Very often procurement was accompanied by robbery and brutal violence against villagers. Apart from their desperate need for food, many partisans forced peasants to give them

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[56] Alexander Brakel, "'Das allergefährlichste ist die Wut der Bauern': Die Versorgung der Partisanen und ihr Verhältnis zur Zivilbervölkerung. Eine Fallstudie zum Gebiet Baranowicze 1941–1944," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zetgeschichte,* vol. 55, no. 3 (2007): 393–424; Alexander Brakel, *Unter Rotem Stern und Hakenkreuz: Baranowicze 1939 bis 1944. Das westliche Weißrussland unter sowjetischer und deutscher Besatzung* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009); Alexander Brakel, "The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4," in Ben Shepherd and Juliette Pattinson, eds., *War in a Twilight World: Partisan and Anti-Partisan Warfare in Eastern Europe, 1939–45* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 80–101. Brakel points out that, in its negotiations with the Soviet partisans, the Home Army insisted on three conditions: (1) that German-seized estates not be set on fire because this would also have an impact on food provisions for the local population; (2) that only selected persons be sent on requisitions to the villages and that they behave properly; and (3) that each side be free to deal with "bands" who were found robbing.

everything they wanted. Alcohol was, unsurprisingly, in particularly high demand, but they also stole goods of no use to them, including lingerie. When peasants refused to surrender their belongings, they were threatened, beaten up or even shot. Rape was especially widespread. Drunken partisans were particularly dangerous for the peasants and violence regularly became an end in itself.

One Polish girl remembered how the partisans targeted her village nearly every night. One day they demanded vodka, and when her uncle told them that they did not have any, he was shot in the head. The offender commented that there was no sense in a human being without vodka. At another estate a partisan tried to rape a maidservant. When the farmer's son dared to help her, a bystanding partisan killed him.

The chief of staff of the detachment 'Suvorov' organized collective drinking bouts with his fellow commanders. Completely drunk, one of them tried to rape two female partisans. … The search for alcohol turned some procurement operations into veritable 'vodka expeditions': partisans of the 'Stalin' brigade used most of the groceries obtained from the peasants in one village to exchange them from vodka in the next. According to a commander … he could give several hundred examples of partisans beating, hanging or shooting peasants for only half a litre of alcohol. …

A report sent to the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement in June 1943 described the situation with the partisan brigade "Frunze' that operated in the Baranovichi [Baranowice] region:

> The brigade consisted of 650 armed fighters […], most of them former soldiers of the Red Army. The leaders of the brigade did not order them to fight, did not train them and did not try to close links with other brigades and detachments. There was no discipline at all. Drinking, marauding and illegal executions were widespread. The population called the 'Frunze' brigade looters and bandits.

The situation in other brigades was similar, even though "Frunze' may well have been the most extreme. Already the chronic lack of ammunition constrained the partisans' ability to fight the Germans. Instead, most of them were idle and roaming the forests. This, of course, impacted negatively upon their discipline and further encouraged their misuse of alcohol. In August 1943 a special correspondent of the Central Staff of the Partisan Movement drew a disastrous picture of the situation in the Baranovichi region:

> Peasants ceased seeing any difference between bandits and proper partisans. Bandits mingle with partisans, thus plundering the local population. Many partisan detachments take part in this. Gambling, drunkenness, robbery, lack of discipline, disobedience of orders can be encountered within all detachments. This brings discredit on the partisan movement. …

Party plenipotentiaries tried vigorously to stop such behaviour. They imposed a ban and prosecuted those who violated it. Some especially brutal partisans were even sentenced to death. However, the permanent lack of qualified fighters made it difficult to execute them. Condemned men were usually reprimanded and given the chance to atone. Very telling is the case of one company commander who was three times sentenced to death for looting, rape and other forms of violence

against the civilian population. On each occasion, he pledged to change his behaviour and was granted amnesty. However, when he failed for the fourth time, he was eventually shot. …

In essence, then, Communist partisan leaders could combat lack of discipline and senseless violence on the part of their units, but food procurement was inevitable for military and economic reasons. And the only way to get food was to take it from the peasants. … the determining consideration for the partisan nutrition was how much partisans could obtain from their operational area, rather than the well-being of the population within it. …

Partisan violence was not restricted to food procurement. It was also a means of imposing ideological discipline on the local inhabitants of Belorussia. According to Soviet doctrine, the entire Belorussian territory belonged to the Soviet Union. Every single person there was subject to Soviet orders. All men could be drafted into the Red Army or its partisan representative on occupied soil. And many were indeed drafted. For example, 16 per cent of members of the Stalin Brigade were drafted from the local population. Young men were chosen and ordered to join the nearest partisan unit immediately. Those who did not agree were executed.

Even worse was the treatment of locals whom partisans suspected of collaborating with the Germans. Partisans not only shot suspects, but often their families as well and burnt down their houses. …

Frequently, partisans terrorized other personnel of the occupation system such as mayors and even teachers. … Members and sympathisers of the Polish underground, the *Armia Krajowa* were another group of victims. … After the German attack on the Soviet Union [in June 1941] the Polish Government-in-Exile resumed diplomatic relations with Moscow. Thus, in the first period of the war, the two resistance movements supported each other against the Germans, or at least avoided significant conflict. However, the leaders of both movements were under no illusions about the extent of their ideological antagonism. The Soviet partisans tried to re-establish Soviet power in the German occupicd territories and thus also incorporate the eastern parts of pre-war Poland into the Soviet Union. The Home Army, on the contrary, dreamt of resurrecting the Polish state within its pre-September 1939 borders. For this purpose they tried to cooperate with the Soviet partisans and hoped for a general uprising against the occupier.

After the German defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk, when it became clear that Soviet victory was only a matter of time, Soviet partisan officials lost interest in further cooperation and stopped negotiations. They now regarded their main duty as the cleansing of the occupied territories of 'hostile elements'. With the Red Army dealing effectively with the Germans, the main opponent was now the Polish underground; in November 1943 [Pantaleimon] Chernyshev [the chief of the Central Partisan staff] ordered the disarming of the Polish units.

This was the beginning of guerilla warfare between the two underground movements. [This pertains to the Home Army's Nowgródek District, as Polish partisans had already been murderously "disarmed" by the Soviet partisans in the Wilno District in August 1943. *M.P.*] … Anyone who gave food or shelter, voluntarily or not, to the Polish partisans risked mass reprisals against their village. This might take the form of verbal threats, physical beatings or death by shooting. Occasionally, the partisans burned down barns and crofts, depriving families of their livelihood. Within the Baranovichi region, more than 500 alleged followers of the *Armia Krajowa* lost their lives. An additional 4000 were registered in membership lists. When the Red Army reoccupied the territory in

> the summer of 1944, partisan leaders handed these lists over to the NKVD, which dealt with the registered persons in its own special way.[57]

When Polish partisan units became active and assumed the role of protectors of the Polish civilian population in mid-1943, another dimension came to the fore. Conditions became more precarious still for the civilian population. Polish historian Michał Gnatowski argues compellingly that Soviet partisans resorted to exceptionally brutal robberies, which began to take on the characteristics of class and ethnic-based retaliation directed at those suspected of supporting the Polish underground.[58] This, alongside the severe reprisals undertaken by the Germans to combat anti-partisan warfare, meant that the population was trapped between rival terrors competing for its cooperation by whatever means.

In his important overview, *Poland's Holocaust,*[59] Tadeusz Piotrowski traces the major political developments affecting Soviet-Polish relations in that period. An appreciation of those conditions is an essential backdrop for any serious study of the relations between the Poles and the Jewish partisans in this area. Piotrowski writes:

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[57] Alexander Brakel, "The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4," in Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World,* 87–93. In a companion study in that same volume (pp. 102–27), "The German Gendarmerie and Partisans in Belorussia, 1941–4," Erich Haberer argues that, in spite of the Soviet partisans' superior numbers in administrative commissariat (*Gebietskommissariat*) of Baranowicze, the German Gendarmerie, which numbered some 70–80 German gendarmes, remained more or less in control of the countryside well into 1943, thanks to the recruitment of reliable local policeman (*Schutzmänner),* who were mostly Belorussians. Their numbers increased from 816 in November 1942 to 1,065 the following March, and 2,363 by June 1944. This was largely due to the Germans' ability to adopt effective counter-insurgency measures and, simultaneously, retain the tacit support of much of the predominantly Belorussian civilian population, who readily informed the police on the whereabouts of partisans. Haberer is also of the opinion that the Achilles' heel of the Soviet partisans throughout was the procurement by force of provisions (food, livestock, clothing, weapons and alcohol). These foraging operations, which often turned violent and deadly, brought them into conflict with the peasantry, who and were quick to report on the pillaging, beating and killing of civilians, and burning of property. The most favourite targets, though certainly not the most frequent, were German "estates" (*Staatsgüter*), that is, prewar Polish estates turned into state farms by the Soviet occupiers. However, any meaningful popular support for the Germans was eventually undermined by escalating requisitions, forced labour and recruitment for the police force in a desperate effort to mobilize all human and material resources to avert defeat. But even then, these were offset by the ongoing Soviet tactics. The peasants accommodated themselves to whoever was in charge and, more often than not, this still happened to be the Gendarmerie.

[58] Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 188.

[59] This invaluable book contains sections on Jewish (Chapter 3) and Polish (Chapter 4) wartime collaboration, with both the Soviets and the Nazis, as well as that of other nationalities who lived in prewar Poland. Piotrowski deals with Yaffa Eliach's charges on pp. 91–94. The excerpts below are reproduced from pp. 98–100 of *Poland's Holocaust: Ethnic Strife, Collaboration with Occupying Forces and Genocide in the Second Republic, 1918–1947,* © 1998 Thaddeus M. Piotrowski, by permission of McFarland & Company, Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640. <www.mcfarlandpub.com>. The author's endnotes have been omitted here.

After breaking off diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile (April 1943) over Katyn,[60] Moscow ordered—on June 22, 1943, at a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia, Lithuania and Ukraine—the Soviet partisans to "combat with

[60] Katyn was the site of the mass grave of almost 4,500 of the 14,500 Polish officers who were taken as prisoners of war by the Red Army in 1939 and executed in the spring of 1940. The discovery of the mass grave by the Germans in April 1943 gave rise to sharp denials (the Soviets accused the Germans of perpetrating the crime) and led to the Soviet Union breaking off relations with the Polish government in exile on April 25, 1943. In 1989, nearly 50 years after the massacre, Soviet scholars revealed that it had indeed been ordered by Stalin. The topic of Katyn has a long and impressive bibliography. Two of the more recent and important publications are authored by Allen Paul: *Katyn: The Untold Story of Stalin's Polish Massacre* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1991); *Katyn: Massacre and the Seeds of Polish Resurrection* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1996). Herman Kruk, the chronicler of the Wilno ghetto, argues that Polish-Jewish relations took a turn for the worse after the Katyn revelation, since German propaganda blamed the Bolsheviks and Jews in their service for the crime. See Herman Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles of the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939–1945* (New Haven and London: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Yale University Press, 2002), 523–24. Unfotunately, there is some truth to this charge. An inmate of Ostashkov recalled that the deputy commander of that infamous camp for massacred Polish officers was a Jew from Sokółka, a ruthless NKVD captain who was the "terror of the entire camp." See the account of Jan B. in Jan Tomasz Gross and Irena Grudzińska-Gross, *W czterdziestym nas Matko na Sybir zesłali…: Polska a Rosja 1939–42* (London: Aneks, 1983), 388. Based on the testimony of a Polish Jew by the name of Abraham Vidro (Wydra), an article that appeared in an Israeli newspaper in 1971 strongly suggests that Jewish functionaries were implicated in the massacre of Polish officers at Katyn and other camps. See "A Jewish Major [Yehoshua Sorokin] in the Soviet Security Service Confessed: 'What My Eyes Saw—The World Will Not Believe,'" *Maariv* (Tel Aviv), July 21, 1971. Russian investigative journalist Vladimir Abarinov believes that NKVD General Leonid F. Raikhman (or Reichman, alias Zaitsev) may have been the immediate organizer of the Katyn massacre. Abarinov also lists other NKVD–NKGB officers, some of them undoubtedly Jews, who were directly involved in the Katyn action. See Vladimir Abarinov, *The Murderers of Katyn* (New York: Hippocrene, 1993), 170. Based on a large number of sources, Jacek Trznadel identified Lazar Kaganovich as one of those who, along with Stalin, signed the execution order and a number of other Jews implicated in the Katyn massacre (Begman, Elman, Feldman, Gertsovsky, Goberman, Granovsky, Krongauz, Leibkind, Raikhman, Slutsky, Vishnyakova, Vitkov, Zilberman), as well as some who were actual perpetrators at the scene (Abram Borisovich and Chaim Finberg). See Jacek Trznadel, *Powrót rozstrzelanej armii: Katyń–fakty, rewizje, poglądy* (Komorów: Antyk–Marcin Dybowski, 1994), 94–115, 336. *M.P.* ("*M.P.*" denotes the author's notes.)

every possible means bourgeois-nationalist units and groups [i.e., the Polish partisans]."[61] In Belorussia, these orders were implemented by Pantelemon Ponomarenko, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Belorussia and later chief of general staff of the partisan movement with headquarters in Moscow. In "Western Belorussia,"[62] the only legitimate partisan units in the territories "which formed an integral part of the Belorussian Republic" were to be Soviet or "those oriented to Soviet interests." The Soviets, then, increased their partisan strength in "Western Belorussia" from 11,000 to 36,800 men in 1943.

As a result of the above-mentioned order, the partisan unit led by Antoni Burzyński ("Kmicic") was liquidated, at the end of August 1943, as was, later [that year], Kacper Miłaszewski's unit as well.[63] The modus operandi was always the same: leaders of the Polish partisans were invited for talks, during which they were disarmed and their units liquidated. Similar events occurred in the

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[61] These instructions were disseminated in a circular dated June 22, 1943, issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia, and at a meeting of its Central Committee Bureau convened on June 24, 1943. A truncated version of the circular titled "On the Military and Political Tasks of Our Work in the Western Districts of Belorussia," was published in Mieczysław Juchniewicz, *Polacy w radzieckim ruchu partyzanckim 1941–1945,* 2nd revised and expanded edition (Warsaw: Ministerstwo Obrony Narodowej, 1975), 302. The full text of the circular and the stenograph of the meeting of of June 24, 1943 are found in Michał Gnatowski, *Białostockie Zgrupowanie Partyzanckie* (Białystok: Dział Wydawnictw Filii UW, 1994), 119 ff.; Michał Gnatowski, "Dokumenty o stosunku radzieckiego kierownictwa do polskiej konspiracji niepodległościowej na północno-wschodnich Kresach Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1943–1944," *Studia Podlaskie,* no. 5 (1995): 211–47; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 35–42; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 121–24, 236–45; Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 181–85. These directives specifically targeted "Polish groups formed by reactionary nationalist circles" (i.e., the Home Army) and called on the staff of the Soviet underground movement to oppose "Polish nationalists" by every available means, to compromise them in the eyes of the Poles, and to gain the support of the local population for the Soviet authorities. In those regions where the influence of the Polish underground was strong, the Polish units were to be squeezed out; agents were to be introduced into the units to cause their break-up from within and demoralize their members; and trustworthy persons in the units were to be won over to collaborate with the Soviet underground. *In those regions were the Soviet underground was sufficiently strong, the leaders of the Polish underground were to be eliminated quietly; Polish units were to be disbanded or absorbed where possible; and disarmed Polish partisans were to be incorporated into Soviet units, and later purged quietly of hostile elements.* The prewar Polish territories were considered to be an "integral part" of the Belorussian SSR and "inseperable territory" of the Soviet Union. As we shall see, this blueprint for a concerted assault on the Polish partisan movement was soon to be implemented with considerable success. Soviet propaganda literature disseminated among the local population accused the Polish government of conducting treacherous politics toward the Soviet Union and being capitulatory toward Germany. For an excellent overview of the dynamics of the relations between the Polish and Soviet partisans in this region see Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 177–92. See also Zygmunt Boradyn, "Partyzantka sowiecka a Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie 1941–1944," in Jasiewicz, *Europa nieprowincjonalna,* 729–39, for an overview of the ensuing struggle (that took hundreds of lives on each side), in which the Home Army retaliated against a concerted campaign of aggression directed against it and its civilian supporters by the NKVD–NKGB structures attached to Soviet partisan formations. *M.P.*

[62] That is, Poland's prewar provinces of Wilno, Nowogródek, Białystok and Polesie, which were seized by the Soviet Union in September 1939 and "incorporated," for the most part, into the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic. *M.P.*

[63] Information about the treacherous Soviet assaults on Naliboki (May 8, 1943), Burzyński's unit (August 26, 1943), and Miłaszewski's unit (December 1, 1943) was published in the West soon after the war but made little impression at the time. See Komisja Historyczna Polskiego Sztabu Głównego w Londynie, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej,* vol. 3: *Armia Krajowa* (London: Instytut Historyczny im. Gen. Sikorskiego, 1950), 530; Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent: Adventures from the Underground Movement Narrated by Paratroops of the Polish Home Army* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 144, 152–58; Antoni Bogusławski's afterword in Tadeusz Łopalewski, *Między Niemnem a Dźwiną: Ziemia Wileńska i Nowogródzka* (London: Wydawnictwo Polskie and Tern (Rybitwa) Book, 1955), 244–45. *M.P.*

Wilno area, in Lublin, in Wołyń [Volhynia], and in Eastern Galicia, including Lwów itself, where the regional AK [Armia Krajowa] leaders under Lieutenant Colonel Władysław Filipkowski, as well as a group of members of the regional Polish Government Delegation for the Homeland, were arrested and sent to the USSR.

On February 18, 1944, Deputy Ivan Serov[64] of the First Belorussian Front, the chief officer in charge of the mopping-up operations aimed against Polish resistance, reported to [Minister of Internal Affairs Lavrentii] Beria that he had arrested 5,191 Poles. On July 14, 1944, Stalin issued his Order No. 220145 to General [Ivan] Cherniakovsky[65] of the Third Belorussian Front and to Serov. This new order called for an "immediate and energetic action against Polish armed underground formations." On July 17, Beria informed Stalin:

> Today, we called upon the so-called general—major "Wilk" (Kulczycki) [Aleksander Krzyżanowski]. We informed "Wilk" that we were interested in the combat abilities of Polish formations and that it would be good if our officers could become acquainted with these tactics. "Wilk" agreed and revealed to us six locations of the whereabouts of his regiments and brigades. We were also interested in his officers corps and proposed a meeting with all the leaders of his regiments and brigades, their deputies, and chiefs of staff. "Wilk" also agreed to this and gave corresponding orders to his liaison officer who promptly left for headquarters.
>
> Later, we disarmed "Wilk." …
>
> On the basis of the information provided by "Wilk," we came up with the following plan. …
>
> [Beria's July 19, 1944 report:] The action lasted two days.
>
> Yesterday [July 18] … as of 4:00 P.M., we disarmed 3,500 persons, including 200 officers and NCOs.[66]

That July, Beria reported to Stalin that 60,000 Polish soldiers had been disarmed, including 15,000 AK members. Beria and Cherniakovsky then requested Stalin's permission to hand over to the NKVD, the NKGB [National Commissariat for State Security], and SMERSH [Russian acronym for "Death to Spies," an umbrella name for three independent counter-intelligence agencies in the Red Army] the officers with an "operative value" (i.e., potential for collaboration with the Soviets [and those who may have had intelligence information—*M.P.*]) and to direct the

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[64] As People's Commissar for Internal Affairs in the Ukrainian Republic Serov oversaw the deportation of Polish citizens from Polish territories annexed in 1939. Lavrentii Tsanava, mentioned later, was his counterpart in the Belorussian Republic and fulfilled an analogous role in that republic.

[65] According to one Jewish sources, General Ivan D. Cherniakhovskii was a Jew. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 374; Cohen, *The Avengers,* 146. *M.P.*

[66] Albina F. Noskowa [Noskova] and Alina Fitowa, eds., *NKWD i polskie podziemie 1944–1945: Z "teczek specjalnych" Józefa W. Stalina* (Kraków: TAiWPN Universitas, 1998), 41–42. This is an expanded Polish-language version of a book that first appeared as Albina F. Noskova, ed., *NKVD i polskoe podpole 1944–1945: Po "osobym papkam" I. V. Stalina* (Moscow: Institut Slavianovedeniia i Balkanistiki RAN, 1994). *M.P.*

remaining officers to various NKVD camps "lest they undertake the organization of numerous Polish underground formations."[67]

In another report based on Serov's field reports, Beria informed Stalin: "In the course of our work in the liberated territories of the Lithuanian SSR [i.e., the Wilno area], from July to December 20, 1944, the NKVD and NKGB arrested 8,592 persons. 1,589 bandits were killed. From December 20, 1944, to January 1, 1945, 3,857 persons were arrested. 985 were killed. Thus, the NKVD and NKGB in the Lithuanian SSR arrested 12,449 persons in all and killed 2,574 bandits as of January 1, 1945. [Among those arrested were: … (d) 3,976 members of the Home Army.]"

After these successes, Serov was sent to the Lublin area, where, under the direction of the NKVD, NKGB and SMERSH, further "actions" were carried out. In December 1944, Serov informed Beria that 15,000 AK members were detained in Lublin.

Meanwhile, on November 14, 1944, Lavrenti Tsanava (of the Second Belorussian Front and the People's Commissar of Internal Affairs in Belorussia) and Viktor S. Abakumov informed Beria: "On November 12, 1944, we sent a second transport (no. 84180) consisting of 1,014 active members of the AK and other Polish underground organizations to the NKVD camp in Ostashkov. During the operation, 1,044 persons in all were arrested and deported."

On January 11, 1945, Beria issued Order No. 0016 instructing his commanders to deal with "hostile elements in the liberated territories." On January 11, 1945, Serov informed Beria that 13,000 members of the AK and other Polish organizations had been arrested. In a report issued one week later, Serov told Beria of the arrest of an additional 10,000 persons, including over 5,000 participants in the Warsaw Uprising.

In April 1945, Beria's Order No. 00315 called for the execution of "hostile elements." This order also specified that county officials, town and regional civil servants, editors of newspapers and journals, and authors of anti-Soviet publications be arrested and deported to the USSR. At the end of that month, Serov informed Beria that 50,000 persons had been detained in his sphere of operation.

Several of the high-ranking operatives in this territorial cleansing of anti-Soviet forces were Jews —for example, Serov's deputy Aleksandr Vadis and Tsanava and his deputy Yakov Yedunov. Both Vadis and Yedunov served as chiefs of SMERSH.

The Soviet war against the Polish underground continued for the remainder of the war and beyond. According to General Leopold Okulicki, commander of the Home Army, between July and December of 1944, some 30,000 AK members east of the Vistula found themselves under Soviet arrest. (In Lublin province the number was 15,000, in Białystok province, 12,000.) According to Czesław Łuczak, of the 70,000 AK members who participated in Operation "Burza" ("Tempest," the 1944 attempt to liberate Polish territories), 5,000 were killed in action and 50,000 were deported to the USSR, where many more died. Meanwhile, oblivious to this treacherous turn of

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[67] Norman Davies cites similar orders dating from July 20, 1944, which indicate the established procedures for the "liquidation of bandit-insurgent formations":

> 3. AK staff officers with operational significance should be transferred to the relevant organs either of the NKVD–NKGB or of *Smyersh* counter-intelligence.
> 4. Remaining AK officers should be sent to NKVD camps since otherwise they would occupy themselves by forming Polish underground operations.

See Davies, *Rising '44,* 473. *M.P.*

> events in the summer of 1943, the Polish government-in-exile in London, and consequently the leadership of the AK, continued for a time to encourage the members of the Polish underground to cooperate with the Soviet army and partisans in the war against the Germans. It is against this background that one must view and assess the "tactical collaboration" of individual AK units in Wileńszczyzna and Nowogródek.[68]

Thus the situation in northeastern Poland—the Wilno and Nowogródek regions—became increasingly complicated and volatile. The Home Army was late in forming in that area, coming out into the open as a combat force only in the spring of 1943.[69] It was not at any time in effective control of much of that ethnically mixed territory, which was composed mostly of Poles and Belorussians, with pockets of Lithuanians along the prewar Polish-Lithuanian border, i.e., the westerly part of this region.[70] (By then only tiny remnants of the Jewish population survived hiding in the forests.) The strength of the Home Army depended not on the control of the forests, where the Soviet partisans were based and predominated, especially in the eastern parts of the Borderlands, but on the support it received from the Polish population in the countryside where most its members were recruited and where underground fighters often hid from the Germans.

The Home Army, the only Polish underground force in the area, was a national army which was loyal to the Polish government in exile and sought to protect the interests of its constituents. Unlike the Soviet partisans, its membership was voluntary. Its composition reflected the make-up of the local population, and thus consisted mainly of villagers. In the Nowogródek region, it is estimated that between 30 and 40 percent of its members were Belorussians of the Orthodox faith.[71] The Home Army also welcomed Muslim

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[68] The issue of "tactical collaboration" is discussed in *Poland's Holocaust* at 88–90 and commented on later in this work. *M.P.*

[69] The first combat unit fighting in the open was the unit commanded by Antoni Burzyński "Kmicic". The development of the Home Army is traced in detail in Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 7–70.

[70] According to the 1931 census, the ethno-religious make-up of the province (*województwo*) of Wilno, with a population of 1,263,300, was as follows: 62.5 percent Roman Catholic (almost all of whom were Poles, with a smattering of Lithuanians near the Lithuanian border and some Belorussians in the northern part); 25.4 percent Eastern Orthodox (most of whom were Belorussians, with a small number of Russians as well); and 8.7 percent Jewish (by religion). The Lithuanian component of the city of Wilno was about one percent, whereas Jews constituted 28 percent of the city's population. The make-up of the province of Nowogródek, with a population of 1,057,200, consisted of: 40.2 percent Roman Catholics (mostly Poles, but also some Belorussians); 51.3 percent Eastern Orthodox (almost all of whom were Belorussians); and 7.8 percent Jews (by religion). Almost all the Jews gave their native language as Yiddish (occasionally Hebrew); in the city of Wilno, some of the Jewish intelligentsia was Russian speaking (rarely Polish). See *Mały Rocznik Statystyczny 1939* (Warsaw: Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 1939), 11, 23, 25.

[71] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 45–48, 141; Janusz Prawdzic-Szlaski, *Nowogródczyzna w walce 1940–1945* (London: Oficyna Poetów i Malarzy, 1976), 110, 192, 229; Iauhen Siamashka, *Armiia Kraiova na Belarusi* (Minsk: Belaruskae vydavetskae Tavarystva "Khata,", 1994), 131; Krajewski, *Nowogródzki Okręg AK w dokumentach,* 27. An entire company of the Stołpce battalion, for example, consisted of Belorussians. See Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1943,* 382. There were also Belorussian Catholics and the Belorussian language was often spoken among Belorussians serving in the Home Army.

Tatars and Russians into its ranks,[72] and (as we shall see) even some Jews, whom they helped much more frequently than they took in. Indeed, without the support of a large part of the non-Polish population, it would be inconceivable for the Home Army to become the force that it did in this ethnically mixed region.

Both numerically and especially in terms of weapons, however, the Home Army was significantly weaker than the Soviet partisan forces in this area.[73] Yet despite this disadvantage, Polish partisans were known to stage daring attacks on German troops, convoys and outposts (e.g., Wawiórka, Horodno, Iwieniec, Traby, etc.), whereas Soviet partisans engaged in low-key sabotage and diversion.[74] The Home Army assault on the large German garrison in Iwieniec (consisting of about 100 German gendarmes, a Luftwaffe company, and 300 Belorussian policemen who were heavily infiltrated by Poles with connections to the Home Army), on June 19, 1943, was a particularly spectacular accomplishment. The German forces were decimated in a pitched battle and the Belorussian police was disarmed. The Poles captured large quantities of weapons with which they armed their partisan ranks. Polish prisoners as well as about a dozen Jews were liberated.[75] There were no comparable military operations of this magnitude undertaken by the Soviet partisans.

In the initial stages, the Soviet partisans consisted, for the most part, of former Soviet soldiers caught behind the line of the German advance in mid–1941, who had hidden out in the forests and on farms or who

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[72] Lidia Eberle (née Lwow), a Russian of noble birth, first served in "Kmicic's" unit and, after its destruction by the Soviets, in "Łupaszko's" unit. She was captured along with Zygmunt Szendzielarz ("Łupaszko") in 1948 and was imprisoned for more than eight years. See Maja Narbutt, "Ostatni biali Rosjanie," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), February 8, 2002. For other examples of Russians who fought in the Nowogródek District of the Home Army, see Hubert Kuberski, "Russian Emigrants and Polish Underground in 1939–1948," *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej,* Special Issue, vol. 52, no. 1 (2017): 73–136 (Internet: <http://sdr-ihpan.edu.pl/images/volume52no1SI/04_Kuberski.pdf>); Hubert Kuberski, "Rosyjscy emigranci i polskie podziemie w latach 1939–1948, *Studia z Dziejów Rosji i Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej,* vol. 52, no. 1 (2017): 115–74. A group of Frenchmen who deserted from the German Todt organization was also welcomed into Home Army units based in the Wilno area. See Wincenty Borodziewicz, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK* (Warsaw: Bellona, 1992), 89–90, 165, 265–66.

[73] In the spring of 1944, four Home Army districts (*okręgi*) were active in this area: Białystok, Nowogródek, Polesie, and Wilno. Together they counted 1,034 officers, 941 officer cadets, 10,464 non-commissioned officers, and 28,718 soldiers. See Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 181. In the Nowogródek district, the strength of the Home Army was estimated then at more than 5,500 soldiers; by July 1944, it had grown to 7,400, whereas at that time Soviet partisans numbered almost 25,000. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 76, 86–87; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 41, 67. There was a similar disproportion in the weapons available to the Home Army and the Soviet partisans; the latter received large quantities of arms and ammunition via airplane drops. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiek,* 138–39; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 42. There is no basis in fact for the claims, sometimes encountered in Jewish memoirs, that Polish partisans in this area were well equally equipped and were supplied with weapons by the Polish government in exile and Home Army headquarters. There were no Allied airdrops for the AK in the northeastern Borderlands, as the area was well beyond the reach of contemporary planes. Moreover, the Soviets would never agree to allow Allied supply planes carrying supplies for Poles to land and refuel.

[74] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 55–56, 88, 109–10.

[75] Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1943,* 382; Boradyn, *Niemen—rzeka niezgody,* 109–10, 287; Bogdan Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1941: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 212. The Chkalov Brigade assisted in this operation by providing cover for the Polish partisans along the escape routes. Another early mission undertaken by the Home Army that also benefited Jews was an attack on the German police station in Worniany on November 5, 1943; more than a dozen people were liberated, including a group of Jews who were taken to the forest and provided with necessities. Ibid., 21; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 146.

had escaped from German prisoner-of-war camps. Soon they began to form small armed groups which lacked discipline and became known for their crimes.[76] A large number of partisans from Soviet Belorussia also moved into the area. The Soviet partisan command parachuted in a significant number of men to lead, organize and reinforce the Soviet partisan presence. The Soviet partisan movement in this area was divided into three zones or regions, each headed by a recently nominated "general": the Baranowicze region by "Platon" (Vasilii Chernyshev or Chernishov), the Lida region by "Sokolov" (Efim Gapeev), and the Iwieniec region by "Dubov" (Grigorii Sidorok).

According to research carried out by historian Bogdan Musiał in the former Soviet archives in Minsk, in Belarus,

> the Soviet guerrilla operations were initiated by the NKVD/NKGB immediately after the Nazi invasion of the USSR and of its occupied Polish, Baltic, and Romanian territories. On 26 June 1941 the Soviet leadership in Belarus ordered fourteen guerrilla units into the field. They consisted of 1,162 fighters including 539 NKGB, 623 NKVD, and the remainder the Red Army. These detachments were quickly wiped out or dispersed. The forests and swamps of Belarus filled up with tens of thousands of Soviet troops, the stragglers whose regular units had been destroyed in the *Blitzkrieg*. For the most part, these stragglers remained militarily inactive and found some employment with the local rural population, both Polish and Belarusan [sic]. The Germans left them alone until Spring 1942, when they tried to apprehend them. The stragglers fled back into the forest, individually and in small groups, where they established encampments and bases. Soon these groups were joined by the fugitive Soviet POWs and some Jews. There were also camps established and run exclusively by Jewish inhabitants of the area. Meanwhile, the remnants of the original NKVD commandos who had survived the Nazi assault of summer and fall 1941, and new NKVD men sent as reinforcements by Moscow, located the forest hideaways and gradually subordinated to themselves many of their denizens. Simultaneously, the NKVD men reestablished the clandestine communist party structures. By January 1944, out of 1,156 Soviet partisan units of 187,571 fighters, 723 units comprising 121,903 persons, or 65 percent of the total, operated in tiny Belarus.[77]

The ethnic make-up of the Soviet partisans was diverse. The core consisted of small groups formed by Soviet soldiers who had been cut off from their units during the hasty retreat of the Soviet army in June 1941 and had hidden in the countryside and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs) who had escaped from

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[76] For example, in the fall of 1942, drunk Red partisans killed twelve Poles, among them children, in the village of Borki near Stołpce. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 143.

[77] Review by Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Sarmatian Review,* no. 2, (April) 2006: 1217–20, of Bogdan Musial, ed., *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland: Innenansichten aus dem Gebiet Baranoviči, 1941–1944: Eine Dokumentation* (München: Oldenbourg, 2004), 21. Most of the Soviet partisans were based in the eastern part of Belorussia, and fewer than 40,000 in the recently annexed Polish districts. According to Central Staff statistics compiled in February 1944, there were 1,633 partisans in Lithuania. See Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas,* 51, 56, 57, 188.

German camps.[78] Afterwards, beginning in the autumn of 1942, Moscow dispatched Belorussians and Russians from prewar Soviet territory to organize a centralized partisan movement. They included members of the NKVD who were sent to secure Moscow's grip on the local partisan movement. In addition to a military commander, each brigade and its detachments had at its helm a commissar responsible for ideological control of the partisans. Jews escaping from the ghettos started to join the small groups of Soviets operating in the forests as they were transformed into a full-fledged partisan formation. However, they were not always accepted into its ranks, especially if they did not have weapons. Nor did the partisans accept those Jews who were not able to fight such as women, children, and old men. (Many of those Jewish refugees found shelter in the so-called family camps which were loosely attached to some partisan formations and had to provide them with services as craftsmen. It was only towards the end of 1943 that the Soviet partisans were instructed to accept everyone seeking shelter.) As we shall see, many Jews were killed by the Soviet partisans. It was only when the Germans intensified their forced labour policy and deported large numbers of civilians to Germany in late 1942, that thousands of Belorussian peasants joined the Soviet partisans. The Soviet partisans also began to actively press the local population (mostly Belorussians) into joining the partisans, often by force. Some of the conscripts deserted, Poles in particular.[79] Those who avoided conscription met with harsh reprisals. Frol Zaitsev, the commander of the Chkalov Brigade, announced that if the men were not at home with their families during partisan inspections, "the partisans would consider this an attempt at resistance. The threat did not help and farmsteads near the villages of Nikolayevo [Mikołajów] and Malaya and Bol'shaya Chapun' [Czapuń] in Ivenets [Iwieniec] Rayon were burned down."[80] Punishment directed at "informers" and village self-defence (formed on German orders to fend off unwanted partisan raids) did little to win over the population. On September 10, 1943, Soviet partisans "burned the village of Stavishche [Stawiszcze near Osipowicze] to the ground and executed the residents—young and old alike—who did not manage to flee

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[78] Generally, the local population was sympathetic to the plight of ordinary Soviet soldiers who been taken prisoner by the Germans. They often supplied them with food and, in the event of escape, shelter. This led to severe repercussions from the Germans who summarily executed anyone suspected of helping the partisans. Lithuanian historian Rimanatas Zizas mentions a number of Poles who were shot dead in 1941–1942 in the Wilno District for helping prisoners of war to escape from camps and supporting them. See also Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* 107.

[79] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 69–70; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 210, 232; Gasztold, "Sowietyzacja i rusyfikacja Wileńszczyzny i Nowogródczyzny w działalności partyzantki sowieckiej w latach 1941–1944," in Sudoł, *Sowietyzacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej po 17 września 1939,* 278; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 36, 42, 74, 134, 136, 253–54. For further confirmation see Joseph Riwash, *Resistance and Revenge, 1939–1949* (Montreal: n.p., 1981), 60 (the relevant passage is reproduced later in this book); and the account of Moshe Meyerson, in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 476, which states: "those of us in the partisan groups began to enlist all of the villages [sic] youth and thus swelled our ranks. Nearly eight hundred partisans were engaged in the task of enlisting recruits."

[80] Testimony of Mark Tayts, as cited in Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 129 ff.

to the forest."[81] When Soviet partisans pacified the village of Rudnia Nalibocka, a Jewish partisan murdered a villager—in front of his family—who had moved into the partisan's abandoned home after the Germans rounded up and killed the Jews in that village.[82] Support for the Soviet partisans came from an unexpected source. Towards the end of the war, sensing that the tide was turning and fearing retribution, large numbers of former Nazi collaborators (mostly Belorussians, Ukrainians and Russians), who had served in the auxiliary police and other formations, left their posts and were accepted into the ranks of the Soviet partisans.[83] Very few Poles joined the Soviet partisans (and then usually under duress); they made up no more than two percent of their strength in the entire region. The Soviet partisans were therefore not a native formation. They consisted of non-locals to a large extent, and did not reflect the ethnic composition of the area.[84]

Historian Bogdan Musiał provides the following breakdown of the ethnic make-up for the 11,193 Soviet partisans in the Baranowicze district in July 1944: 6,792 Belorussians (60.7%), 2,598 Russians (23.2%), 973 Jews (8.7%), 526 Ukrainians (4.7%), 143 Poles (1.3%), and 161 others (1.4%).[85] Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky gathered the following statistical informaton from Soviet archives, which confirms that few Poles served in the ranks of the Soviet partisan movement:

> In 1943–1944 Jews fought in most of Belorussia's partisan formations. In Baranovichi [Baranowicze] Oblast alone, out of 695 fighters and commanders of the Lenin Brigade, 202 were Jews; in the Vpered Brigade, 579 and 106 respectively; in the Chkalov Brigade, 1,140 and 239 respectively. Altogether, 8,493 partisans fought in 15 brigades in Baranovichi Oblast, Belorussians comprising 46.8 percent, Jews 12.4 percent, and Poles 1.3 percent. By the time the republic was

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[81] Based on the diary of Irina Erenburg, *Razluka: Vospominaniia. Dnevnik,* published in Israel in 1998, as cited in Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 129 ff.

[82] Bogdan Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1941: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 406.

[83] Earl Ziemke, "Composition and Morale of the Partisan Movement," in John A. Armstrong, ed., *Soviet Partisans in World War II* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 147. Ziemke estimates that for the last year of the war, ten to twenty percent of the entire Soviet partisan movement were former Nazi collaborators. According to another source, in February 1943, the Soviet partisan had taken in more than 12,000 Belorussian policemen and members of the Belorussian self-defence and some 2,500 members of the Russian National SS Brigade under the command of Colonel Rodionov (transformed into the First Anti-Fascist Partisan Brigade), which had taken part in numerous rural pacifications. See Eugeniusz Mironowicz, *Białoruś* (Warsaw: Trio, 1999), 160. For a memoir that refers to this phenomenon in the Markov Brigade, see Yoran, *The Defiant,* 141, 145, 157, 167. According to Yoran, some of the former Belorussian policemen were actually spies who continued to work for the Germans surreptitiously, and a number of local policemen who attempted to switch sides were shot after "a night of grueling interrogation." The situation was in fact much more complicated than that. Lacking in personnel, the Germans actively recruited to their police forces, often by pressganging the young men. As Timothy Snyder points out, it was often a matter of chance on which side Belorussians ended up fighting, depending on who was in the village when the Soviet partisans or the German police appeared on their recruiting missions. Afterwards, the Soviet partisans began to recruit Belorussian policemen in the German service. See Snyder, *Bloodlands,* 243–44.

[84] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 138; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 70–74.

[85] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 36.

> liberated in July 1944, there were 4,852 partisans in the Lida partisan zone (Belorussians comprising 48.9 percent, Jews, 28 percent, and Poles 0.5 percent). An analysis of the sources of reinforcement of partisan formations is also significant. Sixty-seven people were sent from behind the lines; 225 came out of the encirclement; 505 escaped from captivity; 313 deserted police formations and crossed over to the partisans; 2,404 came from the local population; 124 from the forest and from private low-paying jobs; and 1,196 from ghettos. [86]

Yitzhak Arad (Rudnicki) describes the composition of his *otriad* (also transliterated as *otryad,* meaning unit or detachment) of the Voroshilov Brigade commanded by Fedor (Fiodor) Markov, which was based in Koziany forest, north of Lake Narocz, as follows:

> The Chapayev unit had about sixty partisans. Its commander was a Red Army officer, Sidiakin, known as Yasnoya Moria [Iasnoie More] ("Clear Sea"). Most of the men were Red Army soldiers who had remained behind the enemy lines when their units disintegrated in front of the sudden German attack in the summer and autumn of 1941. Some of them had been taken prisoner by the Germans and later escaped. There were also local people who joined the partisans for a variety of reasons. Some had been active Communists and joined the partisans out of ideological conviction. Others had joined in search of adventure or to avoid being sent to work in Germany. There were also some sought as criminals by the German authorities who found shelter with the partisans. The Chapayev unit had five Jews who had escaped to the woods in the summer of 1942, when the ghettos in the area were liquidated.[87]

The number of Jews in other units was considerably higher. According to David Meltser,

> The core of the first partisan detachments in the Belorussian forests consisted of escaped ghetto inmates and Red Army soldiers. Jews from the Minsk ghetto made up a significant portion of nine partisan detachments (the Kutuzov, Budenny, Frunze, Lazo, Parkhomenko, Shchors, 25th Anniversary of the Belorussian Republic, No. 106, and No. 406) and the first battalion of the 208th independent partisan regiment. Jews were active in many other partisan groups as well. In the Lenin brigade (Baranovichi [Baranowicze] district) 202 of the 695 fighters and commanders were Jews, in Vpered 106 of 579, in Chkalov 239 of 1,140, and in Novatory 48 of 126. Jews composed more than one-third of the partisans in the detachments that fought in the Lid [Lida] partisan zone. In the Naliboki wood [sic] 3,000 of the 20,000 partisans were Jews, many of them in positions of

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[86] Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 129–46. Smilovitsky provides somewhat different figures elsewhere: "In 1943, 366 Jews fought in the seven detachments of the Lenin Brigade, i.e., out of a total of 1,728 persons. In the four detachments of the For Soviet Belarus Brigade, 176 of 821 partisans were Jews. In the five detachments of the the Forward! Brigade, 103 out of 678 partisans were Jewish, and in the five detachments of the Stalin Brigade the corresponding figures were 93 of 1,075." See Leonid Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944: The Case of Belorussia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 207–34, at p. 215.

[87] Arad, *The Partisan,* 113–14.

> command. Incomplete data record that some 150 Jews were commanders, chiefs of staff, and commissars of partisan brigades and detachments.[88]

Soviet statistics, however, speak of a more modest contribution. At the time of their liquidation, there were 5,077 Jewish partisans in Belorussian partisan formations, which constituted 2.6% of the total number of partisans. In addition, 721 Jewish partisans had been killed (2.88% of all fatalities) and 124 were missing in action (1.06% of those missing). These figures may be low overall because they do not include the 1942 period. The largest concentration of Jewish partisans was, as noted above, in the Baranowicze district (around 8.7%). However, at least 1,000 of these were members of family camps who did not enagae in partisan activity as such. Therefore, the claims of there being 15,000 or more Jewish partisans have no basis in fact.

The undivided loyalty of the Soviet partisans lay with the Soviet Union which had seized and annexed Poland's eastern provinces in September 1939. Despite the outbreak of war between the Soviets and Germans in July 1941, the Soviet Union had no intention of renouncing the territories it had acquired from Poland under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. In the initial stages, Soviet partisans were essentially stragglers who behaved like robbers. Once organized, the Soviet partisans treated the local population—among whom they spread their network of spies—as pawns in the war against Germany. They employed brutal measures

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[88] David Meltser, "Belorussia," in Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Holocaust Encyclopedia* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 64. Martin Dean estimates that Jews constituted about 12 percent of the Soviet partisans in this area. See Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 141–42. According to statistics cited by Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky, Belorussians accounted for almost half of the Soviet partisans in the Baranowice and Lida regions, and Poles between 0.5 to 1.3 percent. Jews accounted for 12.4 to 28 percent. See Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 137. Additional statistics for various brigades are found at pp. 151, 300. Information about the numerous Jews dispatched from the Soviet Union, among them many propagandists and NKVD secretaries and members, is found at p. 151 and in the tables at pp. 356–63. For statistics regarding the ethnic composition of various Soviet brigades and detachments in the Nowogródek area in 1943 see Jack Kagan and Dov Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998), 186–87. According to Dov Levin, at least 1,650 Jews who had escaped from the ghettos, labour camps, and other places in Lithuania (including the Wilno region) had joined various Soviet partisan units in the forests. Their approximate breakdown was as follows: (1) 450 were in the fighting units of the Belorussian Partisan Movement, of whom 350 were received into the Vorshilov and Spartak Brigades and some other units in Narocz, Koziany, and Naliboki forests, and the other 100 into the Lenin Komsomol Brigade in Nacza forest. (2) 850 were in the fighting units of the Lithuanian Partisan Movement, of whom 50 were in the Žalgiris Brigade (near Święciany and Narocz forest); in Rudniki forest there were 400 in the Vilnius (Wilno) Brigade, 200 in the Kaunas Brigade, 100 in the Trakai (Troki) Brigade and some other units, while 100 joined other brigades in other places in Lithuania. In addition, 250 Jews were in camps for the fighters' families and in other Jewish non-partisan forest groups. Not all Jews who reached the forests were accepted by the Soviet partisan units operating there and the partisan command eventually did away with purely Jewish units by disbanding some and replacing Jewish commanding officers by non-Jews in others. See Dov Levin, *Baltic Jews under the Soviets, 1940–1946* (Jerusalem: Centre for Research and Documentation of East European Jewry, The Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, and The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1994), 263–64.

against those who defied them and thus aroused resentment among the population.[89] German field reports from that period attest to widespread plundering and terrorization of the population by Soviet partisans.[90] The rural population also suffered severely from German reprisals against anyone who assisted the partisans. Historian Kenneth Slepyan describes various factors that weighed heavily on relations with the local population:

> Despite the partisans' self-identification as the people's avengers, their actual relationship with civilians was fraught with ambiguities. Partisans portrayed the movement as a demonstration of the people's outrage against enemy invasion and their love for the rodina [i.e., motherland]. …
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> The credibility of partisans as the people's avengers was complicated, however, by the nature of their war and the consequences of their operations—the almost inevitable and vicious retribution the enemy visited on civilians as punishment for the partisans' own actions. The leadership in the war's first year showed very little concern for the fate of the people in the occupied territories, despite occasional references to Stalin's supposed desire to protect them. … The message to the partisans was clear: conduct your operations without any regard to the losses suffered by the Germans and use German reprisals as an opportunity to recruit more partisans. Nor were partisans told via the press or through direct orders that they should make saving civilian lives part of their operations, until the spring of 1943 when it became state policy to protect human and material resources.
>
> The partisans' actual attitudes toward safeguarding civilians varied … The most callous and cynical among them followed the leadership in regarding the populace in purely instrumental terms. They ignored or even encouraged German retribution against civilians, with the justification that the killing of the innocent would only fuel popular outrage against the occupiers and thereby ultimately contribute to a stronger movement. …

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[89] Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 279, 285–86. Rein writes the following regarding the attitude of Belorussian peasants, at pp. 279 and 285:

> many of these [Soviet] soldiers who roamed the forests raided the surrounding villages for food, which did not make them particularly popular with the local inhabitants. Initially, the latter were quite eager to inform the [German] occupation authorities about these soldiers. As early as July 1941, the office of the commander of the Rear Area of the Army Group "Center" reported that during the "police operation" in the [predominantly Belorussian] area of the railway Baranaviči-Luninec [Baranowicze-Łuniniec], 88 "Russians" (that is, stragglers) and 200 Jews who "were engaged in assisting the Russians" were captured "through the active assistance of the inhabitants."
>
> To obtain food, the partisans were compelled to raid the surrounding villages, a fact that made the peasants hate the partisans. It is no surprise, therefore, that the peasants, who originally nicknamed the partisans *lesaviki* (wood demons), were quite ready to inform the German authorities about these raiders. In such a state of affairs, the Germans at first had little problem fighting the partisans.

Rein notes that the situation began to change at the beginning of 1942, when the Soviet partisans became better organized and retaliated brutally against informers and collaborators, often targeting the families of suspected collaborators and even entire villages. Ibid., 139–40.

[90] Maria Wardzyńska, "Terror na okupowanej Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1941–1943 w świetle *Ereignismeldungen UdSSR* i *Meldungen aus den Besetzten Ostgebieten,*" *Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 34 (1992): 109.

> The partisans' self-identity as the people's avengers also contradicted certain realities, particularly their deep suspicions toward civilians in general. Especially in 1941 and early 1942 but continuing in some degree up to liberation, partisans always felt surrounded by spies, collaborators, and enemy sympathizers. Moreover, their own propensity for plundering and banditry alienated and threatened the peasants. Even regulated procurement operations, with their implicit threat and sometimes explicit use of force, must have reminded the peasants of collectivization and forced state procurements …[91]

In addition to conflict with the local population, there was a political, territorial, and ideological conflict between the two main partisan forces in the area—Soviet and Polish. The fact that the Jews, with few exceptions, ended up joining the Soviet partisans, who generally had the upper hand and were largely responsible for the deteriorating relations with the Polish underground, did not augur well for future relations with the local population. Historian Teresa Prekerowa has taken issue with the often-repeated claim that the Jews escaping from the ghettos had to join the Communist partisans because they were turned away by the Polish underground.[92] In fact, most of the escapees from the ghettos never had any intention of joining up with the Poles: their sights were set on the Soviets. Many Jews from the Eastern Borderlands, especially the younger generation, were pro-Soviet in their outlook, if for no other reason than the widely-held belief that the Soviet Union was a far more formidable force than the Poles in the struggle against Germany. Moreover, the territory in question, which was occupied by the Soviet Union in 1939–1941, was in dispute and many Jews were convinced that the Soviets would retake the region after the eventual defeat of Germany. Furthermore, many Jews were also ideologically committed to the Soviet cause. Litman Mor, who was a student at the Stefan Batory University in Wilno just before the war, estimated that "about 60 percent of the Jewish students were communists."[93] According to Prekerowa, "there was no shortage either of Communists or of members of other pro-Soviet parties within the leadership of the Jewish resistance. … although they did not express the views of the entire Jewish

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[91] Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas*, 157, 161.

[92] Teresa Prekerowa, "The Jewish Underground and the Polish Underground," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry,* vol. 9: *Poles, Jews, Socialists: The Failure of an Ideal* (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996): 154–57. This important study was originally published in *Odra* (Wrocław), April 1991, 30–35, under the title "Podziemie żydowskie a podziemie polskie."

[93] Litman Mor, *The War For Life,* Internet <http://davidhorodok.netfirms.com/Mor/TOC.htm>, chapter 6. Translated from the Hebrew, *Ha-Milhamah 'al ha-hayim: Zikhronot mi-sho'ah umi-tekumah* (Tel Aviv: n.p., 2005). The author states that he was in Kaunas in May 1940, when the Soviets occupied Lithuania (acutaully it was in June), where he "witnessed the welcoming of the Red Army. Kovna Jews joyfully welcomed the Red Army with flower bouquets." Ibid.

underground, parties sympathetic to the Soviet Union did play a major, if not a leading, role."[94] Finally, by the time the Home Army partisan units became active, most of the Jewish escapees had joined up with the Soviet partisans or affiliated Jewish forest groups.

The notion that the Home Army could integrate the Jews who escaped to the forest or take them their wings, as some Jewish historians suggest, must be dismissed as highly unrealistic in the context of the Polish-Soviet struggle for supremacy that was unfolding in this region. The Home Army was a military organization, not a social relief agency, and it only accepted trusted armed fighters. As Prekerowa points out, the natural allies of the Jewish fugitives were the Soviet partisans in Eastern Poland and the Communist underground in central Poland, and not the Home Army which supported the Polish government exiled in London and fought for the integrity of Poland's statehood and prewar territory. The basis for this relationship was founded not just in ideological considerations, but also in the enjoyment of mutual benefits. On the one hand, unlike the Polish partisan movement, the Soviet partisans (and Communist underground in central Poland) needed manpower, which the local population was reluctant to supply to that cause. On the other hand, participation in the armed actions of the Soviet partisans (and Communist underground) gave the Jews a chance to wreak revenge on the Germans, without regard to the consequences that befell the local population. Prekerowa concludes her penetrating analysis by noting that "the Home army had good reason to think that a part of the Jewish resistance movement was linked with the enemy Communist camp, and this is a view … that was widely held."[95]

Contrary to what is often claimed, as documented in Part One, a significant number of Jews *were* accepted into the Home Army. Many of them posed as Christian Poles, but some of them did not. Few of them, however, served in the Wilno and Nowogródek regions, where generally the goal of the Jews

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[94] Teresa Prekerowa, "The Jewish Underground and the Polish Underground," *Polin,* vol. 9 (1996): 154–57. There were strong pro-Soviet sentiments among certain Zionist factions and Leftist Zionists saw their future linked with the Communists, whom most Poles considered to be an enemy on par with the Nazis. The Hashomer Hatza'ir faction regarded the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact of August 1939, which partitioned Poland between those two invaders, to be a "wise and justified move." This pro-Soviet stance clearly undermined the territorial integrity and independence of the Polish state. See also Teresa Prekerowa, "Prasa getta warszawskiego jako źródło do badań stosunków polsko-żydowskich," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów,* no. 3 (2009): 347–55.

[95] Teresa Prekerowa, "The Jewish Underground and the Polish Underground," *Polin,* vol. 9 (1996): 154–57.

escaping from the ghettos was to join up with the Soviet partisans.[96] Some Jews joined Miłaszewski's detachment and (Antoni Burzyński's) "Kmicic" detachment.[97] Moreover, some Jews who entered the Soviet partisans in Naliboki forest wanted to go over to Miłaszewski's unit, but Miłaszewski could not accept them because of an agreement with the Soviet partisans not to raid each other's members.[98] Because of the warm reception given by a large part of the Jewish population to the invading Soviet Army, and the many instances of collaboration with the new regime to the detriment of Poles in the years 1939–1941, the Home Army in this area was extremely leery of accepting local Jews into its ranks unless their credentials were impeccable. They simply did not trust the local Jews because they believed that they were more

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[96] One of the members of the Wilno-based "Baza" unit was Eliasz Baran (*nom de guerre* "Edyp"), who fought under the command of Bronisław Krzyżanowski and perished during a mission in 1943. See the account of Bronisław Krzyżanowski in Bartoszewski and Lewinówna, *Ten jest z ojczyzny mojej,* 228–32; Krzyżanowski, *Wileński matecznik 1939–1944,* 137–53; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 109. Bronisław Krzyżanowski sheltered the family of Eliasz Baran, as well as other Jews, and was recognized as a "Righteous Gentile." See Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 411–12. A number of Jews served in the medical corps of the Home Army, such as Professor Michał Reicher of the University of Wilno and Dr. Aleksander Lewin (later Lewiński, *nom de guerre* "Wrzos"). See Aleksander Dawidowicz, "Shoah Żydów wileńskich," in Elżbieta Feliksiak, et al., eds., *Wilno–Wileńszczyzna jako krajobraz i środowisko wielu kultur: Materiały I Międzynarodowej Konferencji, Białystok 21–24 IX 1989* (Białystok: Towarzystwo Literackie im. Adama Mickiewicza, Oddział Białostocki, 1992), vol. 1, 269; Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Myśl Polska* (Warsaw), July 20–27, 1997. Jan Neugebauer ("Zielonka"), a Wilno journalist, served under Antoni Burzyński ("Kmicic"). He was one of the partisans disarmed by the Soviets in August 1943 and later executed. See Jarosław Wołkonowski, *Stosunki polsko-żydowskie w Wilnie i na Wileńszczyźnie 1919–1939* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2004), 331, n.51; Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Komentarze," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 86 (1988): 164. Additional examples of Jews who fought in the Home Army in the Wilno area can be found in Dov Levin, *Fighting Back: Lithuanian Jewry's Armed Resistance to the Nazis, 1941–1945* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1985), 106; Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Myśl Polska* (Warsaw), July 20–27, 1997; Tadeusz Gasztold, *Nad Niemnem i Oszmianką: Z dziejów Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie i Nowogródczyźnie* (Koszalin: Głos Pomorza, 1991), 16; Halperin, *Ludzie są wszędzie,* 157. Another example is that of Dora Perewoski (Parovsky), who joined the Polish partisans, helping out with different jobs, after her husband Shmuel was brutally murdered by Communist partisans. See <http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous/bycountry/poland/Michalowski_Korsak.html>. Nechama Tec cites the case of Leon Berk (Berkowicz), a doctor from Baranowicze, as someone who "was refused entry into a Polish detachment." See Tec, "Reflections on Resistance and Gender," in *Remembering for the Future,* 569, n.59. However, that example is somewhat dubious. Berk's memoir merely states that a Belorussian peasant who made inquiries on his behalf with some unidentified Polish "partisans," at a time when there were still few regular Polish partisans in the forests, reported back that he would not be accepted, and would allegedly be finished off. See Berk, *Destined to Live,* 97. Gaining entry into partisan units was usually through trusted contacts and not casual inquiries.

[97] Dr. Maks Hirsch, together with his wife and three children, and Dr. Jakub Belkin (who was killed by the Germans during Operation Hermann), along with his wife Rachela (Helena) Grossbach, were welcomed into Miłaszewski's detachment after the Home Army facilitated their escape from Iwieniec in June 1943. Dr. Antoni Banis (code name "Kleszczyk"), who was in hiding in Raków, joined the expanded Stołpce battalion. See Józef Jan Kuźmiński, *Z Iwieńca i Stołpców do Białegostoku* (Białystok: n.p., 1993); Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszcz,* 289; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 536. Dr. Hirsch later joined the Bielski family camp where he served as its chief physician. After the war the Soviet authorities accused Hirsch of poisoning two Soviet pilots while working at the hospital in Iwieniec. Hirsch claimed that he was forced to do so, but was nonetheless found guilty and sentenced to twelve years in a Siberian prison. After serving his sentence, Hirsch lived in Novosibirsk. See Tec, *Defiance,* 358.

[98] Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Komentarze," *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 86 (1988): 164; Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszcz,* 289.

inclined to support Soviet rather than Polish interests.[99] Unfortunately, this assessment proved to be accurate in very many cases.

Furthermore, like the Soviet partisans and some Jewish partisan groups, the Home Army as a rule did not accept unarmed men[100] (most Jewish escapees from the ghettos fell into that category). Nor did it create camps for non-partisans (many of the Jews fell into that category). In the early stages, Polish partisans were usually based in the countryside and in villages, and not in the forests, and the Home Army simply did not absorb non-partisans. Another practical consideration which militated against absorbing large numbers of Jews was the increased prospect of brutal German retaliations that inevitably would have been invited.[101] Finally, the Home Army came into its own only in mid–1943, well after the Soviet partisans had established their bases in the forests of northeastern Poland. By that time most of the Jewish fugitives had joined or become attached to the Soviet partisan movement.

The Jews hiding in the forests, whether as partisans or forest dwellers, were preoccupied not with fighting the Germans but almost exclusively with their own survival. They dispatched an endless flow of armed groups into the villages to seize food and other belongings from the villagers. In these undertakings, they enjoyed the protection of those Jews who had been accepted into Soviet partisan units and were engaged in

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[99] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 139. Anatol Wertheim, who hailed from Warsaw and joined up with two other Jews in Naliboki forest, describes a meeting with Lieutenant Miłaszewski at the Polish Legion's base in Derewno (Derewna). They were received warmly and hospitably by everyone at the base, fed, and accommodated overnight, before leaving with a pass guaranteeing them safe passage. It was during this encounter that Miłaszewski informed Wertheim that he was quite willing to accept into his ranks Wertheim and other patriotically-mined Jews from central and western Poland, but not local Jews, whom they did not trust because of their support for the Soviets. Since some members of Wertheim's forest group were local Jews, Wertheim did not accept Miłaszewski's offer.

[100] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 59. As Yitzhak Arad points out, the same practice was followed by Soviet partisans. In Rudniki forest, the "Yechiel's Struggle Group" from the Wilno ghetto wanted to join Captain "Alko's" Soviet partisan group, but the latter refused to accept them on the grounds that he was unable to accept unarmed men and women who lacked military experience and training. He was willing to enlist 20 armed men and suggested that the others establish a separate family camp. See Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 455. The Shchors detachment operatimg near Słonim refused to accept unarmed Jews. See Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 233. The same situation prevailed in other parts of occupied Poland. See, for example, Christopher R. Browning, *Remembering Survival: Inside a Nazi Slave-Labor Camp* (New York and London: Norton, 2010), 252–53, on the fate of Jewish escapees from a labour camp in Starachowice, northeast of Kielce. A Jewish partisan group near Zdzięcioł, known as the "Zheteler detachment," also required those who wanted to join to first obtain a weapon. See Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945,* vol, 2, Part B, 1308. Moshe Lichtenberg, who oversaw a partisan group near Włodawa, required that recruits be in good physical condition and bring their own firearms. See Marek Bem, *Sobibór: Niemiecki ośrodek zagłady 1942–1943* (Włodawa-Sobibór: Muzeum Pojezierza Łęczyńsko-Włodawskiego and Muzeum Byłego Hitlerowskiego Obozu Zagłady w Sobiborze, 2011), 318.

[101] This issue is discussed in Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 2, 36–37; Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne: "Ząb" przeciw dwu wrogom,* Second revised and expanded edition (Warsaw: Fronda, 1999), 319–20 n.204.

similar raids. These so-called "economic" operations or missions assumed massive proportions,[102] resulting in many skirmishes with the impoverished villagers who increasingly resented and opposed the systematic stripping of most of their possessions. Villages that did not cooperate were considered to be "pro-Nazi" and could expect harsh retaliations, as the following account from the Stołpce area illustrates.

> I met up with two Jewish partisans who were from Shverzhen [Świerżeń]. … Every few kilometers, they walked into villages in the Shverzhen region, and requisitioned all kinds of produce from the peasants, taking it all back to the other partisans in the woods. These two Jewish partisans were well armed. The peasants were afraid of them and gave them anything they asked. …
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> We walked … into another forest near the village of Kapula. When we got there, other Jews came out to greet us. There were around thirty of us all together—men, women, and children. … The younger people in the group went into the nearby villages to requisition food from the peasants. The peasants were afraid of us. They gave us food, thinking there were many partisans in the woods, in whose name we came. The peasants were afraid we'd burn their village down, like the partisans did to many others when they were refused food.[103]

A female member of the Kirov detachment writes: "We went to villages and took food. If they betrayed us, the next day the whole village was on fire."[104] A Jewish woman who joined the Soviet partisans, after escaping from the Głębokie ghetto with the aid of a Polish farmer, reported that the partisans' wrath was directed primarily against the local population because of their alleged collaboration with the Germans.

> We killed mercilessly. We killed. We used to go into villages where we knew that the people collaborated with the Germans. We used to kill them indiscriminately. We killed off an awful lot of

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[102] Yitzhak Arad describes the situation thus: "Difficult food problems arose with the swelling of the ranks, necessitating the assignment of *large* forces to 'economic operations,' in the course of which casualties were sustained. … When partisan activity mounted, several villages organized self-defence groups, which were armed by the Germans. The Jewish partisans in Rudniki often encountered resistance from the farmers during their 'economic' raids." See Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 457. Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra") provides the following description of the activities of the Soviet (and Jewish) partisans in Naliboki forest:

> As a rule the Soviet Partisans were well supplied. The large numbers of troops were kept in the region mainly for political reasons. Their tasks were as follows: first, political infiltration of towns and villages and the finding and liquidation of "enemies of the people"; second, the stripping of this "bourgeois country" of everything not possessed by Soviet citizens, and third and last, actions against the enemy.
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> The operations covered by the first two points were carried out very efficiently. … The country was stripped of everything …
>
> But as to the third point of their programme, the Soviet Partisans showed a zeal of greatly diminished intensity. Their operations against the Germans did not go beyond trifles like tearing up the rails, a matter requiring no more than two hours to put right.

See Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 151–52.

[103] Account of Y.G. in Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,* 209–10.

[104] Account of Aida Brydbord (Chaja Czerczewska), as cited in "Women of Valor: Partisans and Resistance Fighters," Internet: <http://www.interlog.com/~mighty/valor/aida.htm>, originally published in the *Journal of the Center for Holocaust Studies,* vol. 6, no. 4 (spring 1990).

> people we knew that were against the Jews. My brother was the leader, he was very good at it … We used to go into villages. We used to find out where they lived, and we pulled them out one by one, and we killed them.[105]

A Jew from Dereczyn who joined a group of Jewish partisans under the command of Dr. Yehezkel Atlas claimed that, at the end of 1942, they killed the mayor of Kozłowszczyzna near Słonim and 25 alleged German collaborators ("agents") in nearby villages.[106]

The close association of the Jewish groups with the Soviet partisans also branded them as pro-Soviet in the eyes of the local population, which did not augur well since the track record of the partisans was increasingly marred by horrific crimes. The Soviet partisans made it clear from the outset that the lives of ordinary civilians counted for very little. Belorussian villages bore the brunt of their cruel retalation.

> Not untypical was the raid on the village of Simakovo [Simakowo] near Mir on 10 November 1942. The partisans burned down the *Schutzmannschaft* outpost building, which had recently been abandoned, 14 houses with their outbuildings, seven barns full of produce, the village hall, the school and the church. One calf, six pigs and 13 sheep died in their stalls.[107]

The number of civilian casaualties in not known. On the early morning of April 14, 1943, Soviet partisans indiscriminately stabbed and shot to death residents of Drazhna near Slutsk and burned alive people, mostly women and children, after a failed attack on a nearby garrison of Belorussian police collaborators, in which the partisans suffered heavy casualties. The partisans burned 37 houses to the ground. Twenty-five villagers were slain by members of the Kutuzov detachment.[108] Hundreds of Polish civilians were also murdered by

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[105] Celia K. (Celia (Tsila) Kassow (Kasovsky) née Cymmer, from Szarkowszczyzna) Holocaust Testimony (HVT–36), interviewed February 25, 1980, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimones, Yale University Library. Celia K's testimony is also cited in Joshua M. Greene and Shiva Kumar, eds., *Witnesses: Voices from the Holocaust* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 99–100: "We used to kill indiscriminately. We killed off an awful lot of people we knew that were against Jews."

[106] Testimony of Benjamin Dombowski, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/635. In his detailed testimony, Dombowski does not report any altercations with the Home Army, but does mention murders of Jews by Soviet partisans.

[107] Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 127.

[108] Viktar Khursik, *Kroŭ i popel Drazhna: Historyia partyzanskaha zlachynstva,* Second revised and expanded edition (Minsk: Radyela-plius, 2006). A member of Captain Nikitin's detachment, which included many Jews who had escaped from the Minsk ghetto, provides the following typically overblown description of the assault: "Our detachment and detachment named after Suvorov took charge of crushing the Nazi garrison in the village of Drazhna. It was one of their biggest and strongest garrisons. The village guarded well enough that our scouts could not enter. When finally two partisans disguised as peasants entered the village, it was decided we would attack at dawm. Both detachments spent all night walking toward our meeting place. When ours reached a small forest near the village that was our arranged destination, we realized that the other detachment had not yet arrived. Their guide had lost his way in the dark. The surprise factor was lost. The battle was long and bloody. More than 100 Nazis were killed, but it wasn't an easy victory. Both groups suffered serious losses." See Albert Lapidus, *My War Childhood: A Prisoner of the Ghetto and Partisan of World War II Remembers,* Internet: Belarus Online Newsletter, no. 1/2006, January 2006, Internet: <http// www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/newsletter/Lapidus.html>.

Soviet partisans for no apparent reason. Georgiy Birger recalled the fate of the parents of a Polish friend who would come to the assistance of his family in their time of need,

> On one occasion, I accompanied my mother to Baranovichi [Baranowicze], where she had a friend who could provide us with supplies. Her friend was a beautiful, young Polish woman called Wanda. Wanda's parents were prosperous villagers who lived on a farm. They were later shot and killed by partisans.[109]

Another reason the peasants became increasingly frightened of contacts with partisans and forest people was because of the punitive measures taken by the Germans. Scores of villages were burned to the ground for their actual or perceived support of the partisans and their inhabitants were murdered or rounded up for slave labour in Germany. An early punitive expedition is described by a Jew who escaped from the ghetto in Stołpce and joined the Soviet partisans:

> On Sunday morning, January 31, 1943, we arrived in the village of Zhavolki [Żawołki]. The people received us well. We ate, washed our clothes. Some weeks later, after we'd been long gone, a German retaliation squad, reinforced by Radianov [Rodionov]'s people, came to Zhavolki. They found out how hospitable Zhavolki had been to the escaped Jews. As a revenge, they massed together the whole village, young and old, babies and gray old men, ordered them all to drop to their knees, and shot every one of them.[110]

As we shall see, German punitive expeditions intensified in the area of Rudniki forest in the early part of 1944. Likewise, because of an assassination of a German official or some insignificant sabotage operation (e.g., tearing up a railroad track that was soon rebuilt[111]), after which the Soviet partisans promptly fled, the

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[109] Georgiy Birger, "My Childhood, A War of Fire," in Hilda Bronstein and Bett Demby, eds., *We Remember Lest the World Forget: Memories of the Minsk Ghetto* (New York: JewishGen, 2018), 37–47, at p. 40, Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/weremember/files/WeRemember.pdf>. Towards the end of the war, as a boy Birger was sheltered in Wilno by a Polish woman named Maria. Ibid., 43.

[110] Account of A.I. in Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,* 239. After surrendering to the Germans in July 1941, Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Gil-Rodionov was held captive in a labour camp. He started collaborating with the Germans the following year. He became the commander of a brigade of Russian renegades that participated in anti-partisan operations. He eventually switched allegiance again in August 1943, bringing over some of the collaborating forces.

[111] The sabotaging of railroads (through delayed-detonation mines) had little impact on developments on the military front, never obstructed German transports for long periods, and had a detrimental impact on the civilian population because of German reprisals. According to Alexander Brakel, "The fact that the great majority of the population would have been better off without partisan activity holds especially true given the partisans' insignificant military effect: their main aim was to sabotage German lines of communication. In the Baranovich [Baranowicze] region they achieved very little in this regard. Although in 1943 the Germans were forced to put some railway sidetracks out of service, the vital main lines remained in working order until the end of the occupation. Besides, the Germans managed to repair most of the damage quickly. Only in summer 1944 did partisans manage to blow up a significant number of tracks at once." See Alexander Brakel, "The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4," in Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World,* 94.

local population routinely bore the brunt of harsh German retaliations, as was the case in the vicinity of Święciany where at least 500 Poles were executed in May 1942 by German and Lithuanian police.[112]

Jewish partisans who engaged in sabotage against the Germans coldly calculated the consequences of their actions for themselves and for their Christian neighbours—the proverbial "other," and the latter inevitably lost out. Allegedly, the first mission undertaken by the Jewish underground in Wilno was the derailing of a train carried out by three of its members sometime between May and July 1942 (various dates are given), some seven or eight miles (or kilometres, according one account) southeast of Wilno, near Nowa Wilejka (sometimes given as the distant town of Wilejka). The incident gains particular significance because of the propaganda value that Jewish partisans—and historians—have sought to attach to it. At the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, Abba Kovner, a Wilno underground leader, testified that this was "the first German [military] train to be blown up in the entire country of Lithuania." He emphasized that "no train had been blown up, not by the Poles, and not by the Lithuanians, and not by the Russians, but one was blown up by a Jewess [Vitka Kempner], who, after she had done it, had no base to which she could return, unlike any other fighter."[113] Of course, that particular claim can be readily dismissed. As a result of the

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[112] In reprisal for an attack by Markov's partisans near Łyntupy on a vehicle carrying three German officials on May 19, 1942, the Germans ordered the execution of 400 men. In fact, as many as 1,200 Poles may have been killed in a series of reprisals carried out primarily by the Lithuanian police in a number of localities, based on lists drawn up local Lithuanians. See Roman Korab-Żebryk, *Biała księga w obronie Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1991), 38–44; Maria Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 136; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 80; Jarosław Wołkonowski, "ZWK-AK a problem mniejszości etnicznych na Wileńszczyźnie," in Piotr Niwiński, ed., *Opór wobec systemów totalitarnych na Wileńszczyźnie w okresie II wojny światowej* (Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2003), 46; Monika Tomkiewicz, *Zbrodnia w Ponarach 1941–1944* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2008), 151–52. See also Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* 55–56, who suggests a lower, though unspecified, number of victims who were mainly Poles. News of these mass reprisals even reached the Wilno ghetto. See Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania,* 294, 319–20. Communist historians falsely claim that these retaliations were evidence of widespread support for the Soviet partisans on the part of the local population. See, for example, Juchniewicz, *Polacy w radzieckim ruchu partyzanckim 1941–1945,* 290. Contemporary Lithuanian historiography covers up the fact that the victims were Poles and that they were killed by Lithuanians. See Bubnys, *Nazi Resistance Movement in Lithuania, 1941–1944,* 11, 23.

Other pacifications were equally brutal. See, for example, Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 42, which describes German pacifications in 1943 in a number of localities (Tuliczewo, Nowosady, Kołki, Sitnica, etc.) in reprisal for Soviet partisan activities. In some instances, Soviet partisans undertook activities that were calculated to incite German reprisals, as, for example, an ambush on some Germans near the Polish village of Jatołowicze on February 21, 1943, which resulted in a punitive expedition in which 90 residents were burned alive. Jewish reports claim that the mining of railway tracks was carried out with remarkable precision and resulted in the derailment of trains loaded with munitions and soldiers. See, for example, Nechama Tec, "Reflections on Resistance and Gender," in John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell, eds., *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2001), vol. 1, 569; and "Operations Diary of a Jewish Partisan Unit in Rudniki Forest, 1943–1944," in Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, *Documents of the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 463–71. Polish sources tell a different story: the victims of train derailments were for the most part ordinary civilian passengers, with relatively few German casualties. Moreover, this form of warfare never took precedence over the constant "economic" operations. See Ryszard Kiersnowski, *Tam i wtedy: W Podweryszkach, w Wilnie i w puszczy, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: Editions Spotkania, 1994), 50; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 136, 139–40.

[113] The Trial of Adolf Eichmann, Session 27 (Part 9 of 10), Internet: <http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/e/eichmann-adolf/transcripts/Sessions/Session-027-09.html>.

Home Army's blowing up a German transport train in the spring of 1942, the village of Łogwiny near Szczuczyn was pacified by the Germans and some villagers were executed.[114] (Harsh German retaliations caused the Home Army to desist sabotage activity in the proximity of settlements.) According to Kovner's own account,

> In those days, the Jews [in the ghetto] would have destroyed us for fear of punishment if they had any hint of these activities [i.e., procuring arms]. They would have blessed us in their hearts, but they would not have hesitated to stone us. …
>
> In June 1942, the command decided to carry out the first attack on the railway—an idea bordering on madness. It was before the partisan groups had started sabotage operations around Vilna [Wilno]. …
>
> Vitka Kempner went out for a three-day reconnaissance trip. She dyed her hair, discarded the yellow patch, mingled with the crowd outside the gate, and turned toward the railway that ran in the direction of Vileika [Nowa Wilejka]. At the same time, preparation of the mine was completed inside the cave [at 3 Karmelicka Street]. Without experience or tools, we prepared by ourselves a mechanical detonator, forged a firing pin. Zadok Gordon got some dynamite from a German bunker. I remember Izka [Iza Matskevich] at that time in the cave. He protested at my preparing the mine; he was afraid I might be killed. …
>
> On June 8, Vitka, Izka, and Moshe Braus left the cave in the Ghetto in order to blow up the first German train. … Next day, when I got the news, I forgot all the rules of conspiracy, ran like a madman into Glasman's room, fell on his neck and kissed him: "Josef—it's been blown up!"[115]

According to another version, the Jewish underground in Wilno had searched for an appropriate location to strike

> somewhere far from the ghetto and far from the forest camps where Jews were used as slave labor.

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[114] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 43.

[115] Abba Kovner, "A First Attempt to Tell," in Yehuda Bauer and Nathan Rotenstreich, eds., *The Holocaust As Historical Experience: Essays and a Discussion* (New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1981), 83, 88. Kovner describes (at pp. 86 and 91) two other railway sabotage actions that are dubious or grossly exaggerated:

> It was Summer 1942. … On a branch line of the Borbishok [Burbiszki] Station stood a train loaded with ammunition. On the open trucks stood, four by four, tanks that were to be sent to the Smolensk front. With the help of engineer Rattner, our fighters prepared six tiny incendiary mechanisms and secretly introduced them into the petrol tanks. As the train went on its way, a fire broke out and the tanks went up in flames.
>
> I remember the first time I blew up a train [near Landwarów station]. I went with a small group, with Rachel Markevitch as our guest. It was New Year's Eve [1942]; we were bringing the Germans a festival gift. The train appeared on the raised railway; a line of large, heavy-laden trucks rolled on toward Vilna [Wilno]. … I pulled the string with all my strength, and in that moment, before the thunder of the explosion echoed through the air, and twenty-one trucks full of troops hurtled down into the abyss, I heard Rachel cry" "For Ponar!"

See also Dina Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow: The Life and Times of Abba Kovner* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2010), 94–96. On the powder magazine operation in Burbiszki see Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, *"Korweta": Referat 999 Wydziału Bezpieczeństwa i Kontrwywiadu Oddziału II Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej: Raporty XII 1941–V 1943* (Warsaw: Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego and Wydawnictwo Littera, 2020), 66.

> The Nazis met each rebellious act with collective punishment, killing a hundred Jews for one dead German. The underground did not want to give the Germans reason to blame the explosion on Jews. …
>
> A few days later, Abba [Kovner] saw the story in an underground newspaper. It said that Polish partisans had blown up a German train transport. *Over two hundred* German soldiers had been killed. The SS then marched into the nearest Polish town and killed sixty peasants. "This is not something I felt guilty about," Vitka [Kempner] later said. "I knew that it was not me killing those people—it was the Germans. In war, it is easy to forget who is who."[116] [emphasis added]

In 1944 Abraham Sutzkever, a member of the Jewish underground in Wilno, penned the following—somewhat different—description of these events:

> It was a May night in 1942. A young man [Iza Matskevich] and woman [Vitka Kempner] crawled through a hole in the fence surrounding the Vilna Ghetto and entered the city. …
>
> They had to hurry. It was already 8:30, and it was permitted to be on the streets only until 9:00. They passed Polotskaya [Połocka] Street and headed toward the highway …
>
> They had arranged to meet Brauze at 11:30 next to an old oak tree near the paper mill. … Brauze had the mine in safekeeping. They moved silently. They went into the woods. Matskevich and the girl crawled under the rails. Brauze stopped in case he might have to cover them. Matskevich dug under the rails with his bear hands. Into the small pit he placed some stones that Vitka had given him. … Having laid the mine, they covered it with sand and headed for Vileika [Nowa Wilejka]. They waded across a stream and stopped on a hill under the branches of a willow tree. …
>
> Now the steam engine could be clearly seen emerging from the depths of the woods; behind it came a chain of rumbling train cars. …
>
> Railroad ties, people, and iron went flying into the air …
>
> Twelve train cars loaded with weapons and Germans rushing to Polotsk [Połock] were blown to bits. …
>
> The peasants who were forced to take away the bodies the next morning told us that they counted *two hundred dead Germans*.[117] [emphasis added]

Hava Shurek provides the following account of these events with even more implausible elements:

> When the dawn arose on 8th July [1942] Vitka [Kempner], Isa Matzkevitz and Moshe Brause left the Ghetto carrying the mine. Their objective was to blow up a German train 7 kilometres south-east of Vilna. The operation had to take place at night and they would have to back in the Ghetto by dawn the next day so that could go out to work as usual.
>
> At the dawn Vitka reached the Ghetto, her legs torn and bleeding, but her face radiant. The mine had been planted and nobody had noticed them. …

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[116] Cohen, *The Avengers,* 62, 64.

[117] Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman, eds., *The Complete Black Book of Russian Jewry* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Transcation Publishers, 2002), 275–76.

> News of the explosion arrived at 3 p.m. The train was destroyed, both engines and ammunition waggons [sic]. The Germans were at a loss, for this was the first operation of its kind near Wilna [sic] where there were many garrison troops. …
>
> It was a happy day for the Fighters in the Ghetto. They laughed in the streets. …
>
> Many coaches containing German soldiers and ammunition in the train which was on its way to Polotsk were smashed. In the morning the peasants counted *about 200 bodies of soldiers, apart from those who were completely blown apart and could not be counted.* After their census the peasants collected pistols, rifles, and many bullets.[118] [emphasis added]

Isaac Kowalski, a member of the Jewish underground, also alleges that, in addition to killing more than 200 German soldiers, the explosion of the landmine resulted in "an even larger number" of wounded soldiers. Although involved in producing underground publications, Kowalski does not say that this event was reported in the German newspapers. Rather, he says that a Jewish scout learned about the toll later from local peasants. Moreover, he insists that the three underground members—Kempner, Matskevich and Brause—were present at the time of the explosion:

> After they waited in hiding for two or three hours, the favorable moment arrived, with the approach of a large transport train rushing soldiers to the front. When the transport came near enough to the partisan ambush, Moshe Brause pulled the cord which set off a tremendous explosion, derailing and turning over dozens of cars.
>
> The three partisans saw a huge burst of fire from exploding ammunition and heard the screams of wounded German soldiers.[119]

Historian Yitzhak Arad provides a more modest version of these events:

> In June 1942, the command decided to mine the German railroad line going to the front. The mine was prepared in the ghetto. After a preliminary reconnaissance of the railroad from Vilna [Wilno] to Vileyka, Vitka Kempner and two other F.P.O. [*Fareinikte Partisaner Organizatzie*—United Partisans Organization] members left the ghetto, and on the night of July 8, 1942, placed the mine on the railroad, 6 miles southeast of Vilna. The trio returned to the ghetto at dawn. The next morning *an ammunition train* hit the mine, and the engine and several wagons were damaged. Farmers in the vicinity were arrested in a German reprisal *Aktion,* but the Jews were not touched.

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[118] I. M. Lask, *The Kalish Book* (Tel Aviv: Societies of Former Residents of Kalish and the Vicinity in Israel and U.S.A., 1968), 316. This source records other fantastic exploits attributed to Vitka Kempner which are found in Ruzka Korchak's memoir *Plamia pod peplom,* referred to later. For example: "One night in October, 1943 she went 40 kilometres on foot carrying a suitcase full of mines, and entered Vilna. There she blew up an electric transformer. Next day she entered the Keilis Concentration Camp and took out 60 people to the Partisan bases. … She took part in blowing up a train near Oran [Orany] where 200 Germans were killed. … She took part in blowing up 2 railway engines and 2 bridges."

[119] Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 115–16.

> The Germans had no idea it was a German operation. It was the first German train to be mined in the Vilna area.[120]

Another restrained version of these events—but darker in its implications—was provided in a 2001 interview with Vitka Kovner (née Kempner), one of the participants. She maintains that only she and Iza Matskevich executed the deed and reports a considerably smaller toll of German victims:

> "I joined the team that was responsible for terrorist attacks outside the ghetto, and my first and important mission, *together with Yoske Maskovitz*, was to detonate a bomb of the railway in order to damage the train that transported equipment to the war front," recalls Vitka. …
>
> "Finally, after months of planning, and with the help of a policeman from the ghetto, we sneaked out the bomb that Abba had built and detonated it. When we managed to get back into the ghetto [without being discovered] it was a day of celebration," Vitka remarks. The bomb worked as planned, and according to the newspapers, a great deal of damage was done to the train cars, and *a few soldiers were killed*. "The Germans believed in collective responsibility and had they known that Jews had executed the bombing they would have had us killed by the thousands." The Germans did not imagine that this was the work of Jews, and therefore, retaliated by executing all the residents in a nearby Polish town.[121] [emphasis added]

In an interview in 1987, Kempner stated:

> I had to look for a place on the railroad. And the Jews work on the railroads—cleaning, bringing food, digging. … I have to find a place where are no Jews, because if it will succeed and they found out that Jews were working there, they can exterminate the ghetto. …
>
> We take the bomb, the mine, outside the ghetto and bring it to the place. *We were two*—one boy who was a policeman … I was the other one. We went out in a group of workers. [The place] was 15 kilometers [outside] the city.
>
> We take the bomb and we put it under the rail tracks. One-thirty at night (the night of July 8, 1942), we put the bomb. We escaped very quickly. When the train goes [over it] at two, it explodes, and from far away we heard the explosion. We come back to the ghetto. Six o'clock we are in the ghetto, [when] they let in [a group of] people who come after the nightwork.
>
> LILITH: Did the Jews in the ghetto know that that this was a Jewish act of sabotage?

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[120] Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 260–61.

[121] Orit Ohayon Madar, "Vitka Kempner: A Partisan's Resolve," *Yad Vashem On-line Magazine,* posted at: <http://www.yad-vashem.org.il/about_yad/magazine/data1/vitka.html>. An undated handwritten account (notebook) penned by Witka Kempner in Polish is equally vague. The date of this event is given simply as the year "42", and there is no mention of any German casualties or nearby residents being executed. See the testimony of Vitke Kempner, Yad Vashem Digital Collections, item 3698218, record group P.18—Kaczerginski Collection, file number 11.

> No. Jews didn't. Nobody knew. Only us … If the Germans will know there is an underground they would exterminate the ghetto. … but in all our units, we stand together and we speak about it, and we were very proud about it.[122] [emphasis added]

When, where and how exactly this event occurred, if at all, is not free from doubt.[123] There no known official German reports or Polish underground reports confirming it.[124] Moreover, during this same same period both the Soviet partisans and the Home Army carried out numerous train derailments.[125] Nor do ghetto chronicles from that period acknowledge the news of an event of such significance. Herman Kruk, a meticulous chronicler of the Wilno ghetto, does not mention this event in his diary at all, even though he records information such as train derailments and German retaliations against villagers from various sources such as the underground press.[126] Nor does Zelig Kalmanovitch, another Wilno scholar who wrote a wartime diary.[127] Rachel Margolis, a member of the Communist underground in Wilno, who had met Iza Matskevich in Kaunas during the Soviet occupation, recalled that, at a conspiratorial meeting of the FPO (*Fareinikte Partizaner Organizatsie*, the United Partisan Organization) in November 1942, Matskevich suggested the blowing up of a German transport convoy, but provides no further information that the

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[122] Aviva Cantor, "She Fought Back: An Interview with Vilna Partisan Vitke Kempner," *Lilith Magazine,* no. 16 (spring 1987): 23–24.

[123] Other versions give rise to further conflicting assertions. Ruzhka Korchak, for example, does not mention the number of German casualties and states that 300 villagers were arrested and interrogated. See Ruzhka Korchak, *Plamia pod peplom* (Tel Aviv: Biblioteka-Aliia, 1977), 119–20. Chaim Lazar quotes Itzik Wittenberg who claims that this act of sabotage caused the enemy "considerable losses." See Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 40. The story is related again somewhat differently by Nechama Tec: "in the summer of 1942 *two women* [sic] from the Vilna ghetto, Vitka Kempner and Izia Mackiewicz, participated in an important sabotage operation to mine a railway track near Wilejka. The mission succeeded. The engine and several wagons filled with munitions were derailed and damaged." No casualties are noted. See Nechama Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men, and the Holocaust* (New Haven, Connecticut and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 281. According to Isaac Kowalski, Izke (Itzhak) Mackiewicz (Yoske Maskowitz) was not a woman, but a Jewish man who worked on the railroads posing as a Tartar. The third member of the party, and, according to Kowalski, the one who actually detonated the mine, was Moshe Brause (Brauz), who had graduated from the Lithuanian Military Academy and became a captain in the Lithuanian army. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Europe,* 114–16, 160.

[124] For Polish reports see Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie, *"Korweta": Referat 999 Wydziału Bezpieczeństwa i Kontrwywiadu Oddziału II Komendy Głównej Armii Krajowej: Raporty XII 1941–V 1943* (Warsaw: Agencja Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego and Wydawnictwo Littera, 2020).

[125] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 85, 92; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 8–11.

[126] Although Herman Kruk does not mention that derailment in his detailed diary entries for the period May through July 1942, he does record on July 4 mass retaliations against Poles in Olkieniki, and on July 11, he writes about train cars being blown up "beyond" Podbrodzie. (Both of these localities are some distance from Wilno: Olkieniki is about 55 kilometres southeast of Wilno, and Podbrodzie is about 40 kilometres northeast of Wilno.) See Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania*, 319, 327.

[127] Zelig Kalmanovitch, "A Diary of the Nazi Ghetto in Vilna," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science,* vol. 8 (New York: Yiddish Scientific Institute–YIVO, 1953): 9–81.

mission ever took place.[128] Indeed, that organization's main preoccupation was saving its own members from German *Aktionen*.[129] However, this does not in any way alter how the Jewish underground calculated and weighed the impact of such operations: their cavalier attitude toward exposing the surrounding Christian population to grave risk stands in marked contrast to their preoccupation not to endanger the lives of Jews by exposing the ghetto population to collective punishment. It is worth noting, in this context, that it was the Polish community of Wilno who provided the Jewish underground with safe shelters and meeting places outside the ghetto, as well as couriers to maintain contact with other ghettos.[130]

This was not an isolated event. The Jewish Fighting Organization (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa–ŻOB*) employed a similar strategy—diverting German reprisals away from Jews and onto Christians—when it staged grenade assault, in December 1942, on the Cyganeria café in Kraków, which was frequented by the SS. However, that ruse backfired because their organization had been infiltrated by informants.

> To throw the vengeful Gestapo off track in the aftermath, the ZOB [ŻOB] raiders left behind leaflets implicating the Home Army. This, they hoped, would prevent reprisals by the angry SS on innocent Jewish residents of the Krakow [Kraków] ghetto. The shirking of responsibility was a risky gambit that [justifiably] could have provoked the wrath of the Polish Resistance had the Germans retaliated

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[128] Rachel Margolis, *A Partisan from Vilna* (Brighton, Massachusetts: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 300, 380.

[129] Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 206.

[130] Seventeen members of the Jewish underground, including Abba Kovner and Vitka Kempner, were sheltered by Polish Dominican nuns in their convent near Kolonia Wileńska outside the city of Wilno. Seven Polish nuns, later awarded by Yad Vashem, assisted the Jewish fugitives in many ways and even procured weapons for the Jewish underground and smuggled them into the Wilno ghetto. See Leo W. Schwarz, ed., *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People* (New York: Rinehart & Company, 1949), 72–73; Bartoszewski, *The Blood Shed Unites Us*, 191–92; Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978), 16–17; Ruzhka Korchak, *Plamia pod peplom,* 22–23; Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 188, 229; Eric Silver, *The Book of the Just: The Silent Heroes Who Saved Jews from Hitler* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1992), 99–102; Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV Publishing House, 1993), 216–17; Mordecai Paldiel, *Saving the Jews: Amazing Stories of Men and Women Who Defied the "Final Solution"* (Rockville, Maryland: Schreiber Publishing, 2000), 209–210; Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part One, xliii–xliv, 108; Mordecai Paldiel, *The Righteous Among the Nations* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem; New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 62–64; Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 45–53. The account of Anna Borkowska (Sister Bertranda), the abbess of the cloistered nunnery, can be found in Bartoszewski and Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations,* 513–17. The other Dominican sisters involved in the rescue operation were: Maria Ostreyko (Sister Jordana), Maria Janina Roszak (Sister Cecylia), Maria Neugebauer (Sister Imelda), Stanisława Bednarska (Sister Stefania), Irena Adamek (Sister Małgorzata), and Helena Frąckiewicz (Sister Diana). Two Polish women from the Polish scouting movement with ties to the Home Army introduced Kovner and Kempner to Anna Borkowska. Irena also offered her own apartment in Wilno as a meeting place for the Jewish underground and smuggled weapons into the ghetto. Helena Adamowicz played a key role as a liaison for the Jewish underground in the Wilno, Kaunas, Białystok, and Warsaw ghettos. Another Polish courier lonking Warsaw and Wilno was Henryk Grabowski. See Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 188, 222–24, 245–47; Bartoszewski and Lewin, *Righteous Among Nations,* 507–523; Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part One, 54–55, 192, 253. Marija Leščinskienė (Maria Leszczyńska), an ethnic Pole, was known as the "mother" of the Jewish partisans from the Kaunas ghetto. See Christopher Lawrence Zugger, *The Forgotten: Catholics of the Soviet Union from Lenin through Stalin* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 450.

> against the Gentile population instead. The Nazis, however, knew full well who was behind the "terrorist" actions because they had two informants in the Krakow branch of the ZOB.[131]

Jewish sources allege that the Home Army simply refused to cooperate with the Jewish underground in Wilno, and that consequently the latter had no choice but to look for contacts with the Soviets. Acording to Israeli historian Dina Porat,

> Outside [the ghetto] there was still no organization they could contact, with the exception of the Armia Krajowa (AK), the nationalistic Polish underground directed by the Polish government in exile in London. [Abba] Kovner was in contact with the AK for almost two months, especially with an eye to obtaining weapons. However, the AK was right-wing and anti-Semitic and regarded the FPO as a Communist underground, and explanations were to no avail. Not only was contact broken off, but later, when the Jews left the ghetto for the forests and hiding places, many were murdered by nationalistic Poles.[132]

In fact, the FPO was not only led by a Communist, Yitzhak Wittenberg, but also included Communists groups in its ranks. As an entity, it was markedly pro-Soviet from its very inception. As Porat points,

> Their first meeting determined the organization's national commitment as well as their wish to act as partisans fighting in the rear and their desire to aid the Red Army in a common war against the Nazis, carrying out acts of sabotage behind enemy lines. Thus the national goals, which they all wanted to achieve, were integrated with the Communists' commitment to be part of the Soviet Union's fighting force.[133]

According to historian Yitzhak Arad, the FPO established its first contacts with the Soviet partisans in the spring of 1942. In April of that year, the commander of the Soviet partisan movement in Lithuania, Albertas Kunigėnas ("Alksnis"), reached an agreement with the Jewish resistance leadership to incorporate the FPO into the Lithuanian partisan movement as an autonomous branch operating inside the ghetto. They undertook to keep in regular contact with each other through the political commissar Witold Sienkiewicz

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[131] Matthew Brzezinski, *Isaac's Army: A Story of Courage and Survival in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Random House, 2012), 223–24.

[132] Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 98–99. See also Korchak, *Plamia pod peplom,* 120–21; Yitzhak Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press; Jerusalem: Yad Vashem: 2009), 486.

[133] Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 80.

("Margis") and the ghetto resisters were to join up with the Soviet partisans immediately after the planned ghetto uprising.[134]

In keeping with its pro-Soviet orientation, the FPO refused to recognize Polish claims to the Wilno area, which the Soviets had seized from Poland in September 1939, handed over to Lithuania, and later incorporated into the Soviet Union outright. In its proclamation of January 1, 1942, the FPO referred to the contested area as "Lithuania." This display of disloyalty toward Poland, and the FPO's significant Communist component, understandably resulted in the Home Army's distrusting the Jewish underground. It also led to the Home Army's refusal to provide the FPO with weapons. As historian Teresa Prekerowa, who was recognized by Yad Vashem as a "Righteous Gentile," points out, the Jewish underground in Wilno was not prepared to distance itself from its unconditional support of the Soviet Union even when they turned to the Home Army for arms, leaving the question of their allegiance, in the event of a Soviet return (which they both anticipated and welcomed), to be "decided at some later time."[135] Unlike in Warsaw, where the Home Army did provide the Jewish underground with arms and military training to launch an uprising and where the Communists were not strong, there was no uprising either in Wilno, where the Communists

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[134] Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 496–98. Polish historian Dariusz Libionka claims that Kovner turned to the Soviet partisans only after he was rebuffed by the Home Army, but offers no evidence in support of the notion that the FPO contemplated an alliance with the Home Army. In fact, the FPO's alliance with the Soviets was not only in keeping with the organization's stated aims, but also its contacts with the Soviet partisans in the area likely preceded its contacts with the Home Army. See Dariusz Libionka, "ZWZ-AK i Delegatura Rządu RP wobec eksterminacji Żydów polskich," in Żbikowski, *Polacy i Żydzi pod okupacją niemiecką 1939–1945,* 99, 111.

[135] Teresa Prekerowa, "The Jewish Underground and the Polish Underground," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry,* vol. 9 (1996): 156. See also Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 248–49, where the author downplays the FPO's non-commital response and its links to the Soviet partisan movement:

> The F.P.O. succeeded in contacting the Polish underground, and negotiated with them for aid in procuring arms for the Jewish group. The Polish underground leaders questioned the F.P.O. on its orientation: was it Communist; what side would it take when the Soviets returned and a struggle between the Poles and the Soviets ensued over authority in Vilna [Wilno]? The Poles were informed that the F.P.O. was not a Communist group, but an organization fighting the Nazis, in which Communists were included but were not the majority. The F.P.O's objective was to fight the Germans until the liberation; the fate of Vilna after the liberation was not its immediate concern, it would be decided at some later time.

See also Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 209, for a similar analysis.

played a significant role in the Jewish underground, or in Białystok, where most of the members of the underground were Communists, despite the fact that the underground in both cities was well armed.[136]

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[136] Although the underground (FPO) in the Wilno ghetto managed to organize and obtain arms, they eventually made a deal with the Judenrat not to stage a revolt in exchange for safe passage for its members out of the ghetto together with the arms that had been smuggled in. Chaim Lazar comments bitterly: "In this way the commander [Abba Kovner] 'fulfilled' Paragraph 22 of the Organization's constitution, which said: 'we shall go to the forest only as a result of battle …'." See Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers,* 16–17; Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance*, 51–111. For the FPO's documents see Betti Ajzensztajn, ed., *Ruch podziemny w ghettach i obozach: Materiały i dokumenty* (Warsaw, Łódź and Kraków: Centralna Żydowska Komisja Historyczna w Polsce, 1946), 133. As Dina Porat points out, Abba Kovner's manifesto which called for Jews to rise up against the Germans was not heeded by the populace. "Jews preferred instead to be exiled or to go into hiding rather than to take to the streets and fight. Even the underground did not physically take to the streets to sweep the masses along with it, nor fid it incite a strike at the Germans and their collaborators." See Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 139. Rachel Margolis, a member of the underground, noted that the leaflets glued to the walls of buildings ("Jews, rise and take up armed struggle!") had no effect: "Jews did not rise up. Not one of them joined us. … Fear defeated all arguments. People in the ghetto thought about one thing—saving their own lives. Jewish men hid in refuges, secret hiding places." The underground then concentrated on getting its members out of the ghetto in order to join the Soviet partisans in the forests. See Margolis, *A Partisan from Vilna,* 355, 358–59. After the departure of the underground from the ghetto, the Judenrat ordered the Jewish police and informers to search for Jews in hideouts and to bring them out by force. "During those last days of the ghetto hatred for the informers and police and for those who betrayed other Jews reached its height and was later manifested in the forest." See Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 139. On the situation in Białystok, where the call for a revolt was rejected by the ghetto inhabitants, see Sara Bender, *The Jews of Białystok During World War II and the Holocaust* (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 258–64.

Contrary to what is often claimed in Holocaust literature, there is no evidence that any planned revolt in a ghetto failed to materialize because of a lack of Polish aid. Many Jewish authors, and even historians, however, have considerable difficulty in coming to terms with this harsh reality, preferring instead to lay the blame squarely on the Poles. Michael Berenbaum, former director of the Research Institute at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, for example, writes: "For a variety of reasons, including the fact that antisemitism among some *Armia Krajowa* members, who were in positions of significance, prevented the adequate supply of arms to Jewish fighters, armed revolt was not carried out in many of the ghettos where Jewish resistance movements existed." (Letter to the Canadian Polish Congress, dated May 16, 1996). A survivor from Łódź, who was deported to the ghetto in Staszów, ruminates: "As to why more people didn't fight, the answer is simple: With what? We had no weapons, and the Poles around us could not be depended on to help. … Moreover, common sense told us that fighting the combined Germans and unfriendly Poles would be futile." See Manny Drukier, *Carved in Stone: Holocaust Years—A Boy's Tale* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 182, 216. These are bogus arguments. Jews did in fact, when they were so disposed, acquire arms and ammunition, albeit in limited quantities, via the black market and from other sources, in the same manner as the Polish underground, and staged open revolts in a number of places such as Warsaw (with the help of the Poles), Białystok, Częstochowa, Nieśwież, Łuck, etc. Needless to add, these revolts were directed at the Germans, not the Poles. While arms were acquired in many ghettos, very few ghettos staged revolts. Invariably, the Jewish underground faced major opposition from within their community which was usually spearheaded by the Jewish Council, with local leaders and even rabbis joining in. With little support forthcoming from the general population, the resolve of the few was usually thwarted. Another significant factor was the Germans' ability to recruit collaborators—Jews who were promised their lives in exchange for information. As Yehuda Bauer notes, "the German intelligence service, which employed Jewish informers, was very efficient and managed to liquidate many of the underground groups." See Yehuda Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl* (New Haven, Connecticut and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 150.

In Ejszyszki, Rabbi Shimon Rozovsky's impassioned plea to acquire arms and "protect ourselves till our last breath" was sternly rebuffed by one faction of the Jewish Council, so the plan died. See Alufi and Barkeli, *"Aishishuk"; Its History and Its Destruction,* 62; Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 581. In Kurzeniec, the Judenrat warned the parents of underground members who were collecting weapons of the threat these activities posed to all of the town's Jews. "When we heard about it," one Jew recalled, "we stormed into the meeting with two drawn guns. We threatened to kill whoever threaten [sic] our families." See the account of Zalman Uri Gurevitz in A. Meyerowitz, ed., *The Scroll of Kurzeniac,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/kurenets/>; translation of *Megilat Kurenits: Ayara be-hayeha u-ve-mota* (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Kurzeniec in Israel and the U.S.A., 1956). A similar situation existed in Iwie (Iwje) where the Judenrat warned the brother of an underground member who started to procure arms that this "activity was liable to bring about the handing over [of] my family to the gendarme." See the account of Meyshe Kaganovitsh in Kaganovich, *In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ivye*. In Głębokie, after some Jews managed to procure weapons from Poles outside the ghetto, "In the Jewish police it was decided to quietly confiscate the weapons and to, somehow, get rid of us … Once, while my brother was sleeping, two Jewish policemen came, took him to the Judenrat cellar, beat

3. Soviet Designs

The Soviet partisan command adopted a similar strategy in relation to the Polish underground and the civilian population. In January 1943, General Ponomarenko outlined the following course of action:

> It is imperative that we ignite partisan warfare in Poland. Apart from military results, it will result in justifiable losses among the Polish population in the struggle against the German occupier and will prevent them from saving up all their forces for later.[137]

Directives aimed at provoking German attacks against the Polish underground were formulated at a meeting of the Central Committee Bureau of the Communist Party of Belorussia held on June 24, 1943. While continuing to engage in talks with Polish delegations about joint operations against the Germans, General Ponomarenko instructed:

> Concurrently … we must direct our partisan units and party organizations to use whatever means to detect and expose to assaults by the German occupiers all local Polish organizations and groups that emerge. The Germans won't hesitate to shoot them if they find out that they are organizers of Polish partisan groups or other combat organizations. … Don't be constrained by any scruples in choosing your means. These measures should be undertaken on a broad scale and organized in such a way that it all proceeds smoothly.[138]

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[137] This excerpt from a "top secret" memorandum from Ponomarenko to Stalin, Molotov, Beria and others, dated January 20, 1943, is found in Ivan Bilas, *Represyvno-karal'na systema v Ukraini 1917–1953: Suspil'no-politychnyi ta istoryko-pravovyi analiz* (Kiev: Libid–Viisko Ukrainy, 1994), vol. 2, 361. The full memorandum can be found in Bogdan Musiał, "Memorandum Pantelejmona Ponomarienki z 20 stycznia 1943 r.: 'O zachowaniu się Polaków i niektórych naszych zadaniach,'" *Pamięci Sprawiedliwość,* vol. 8 (2006, no. 1): 379–85. See also Piotr Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza: Droga do władzy 1941–1944* (Warsaw: Fronda, 2003), 207–208. Concurrently, Ponomarenko issued instructions to send trained "agents" into the field to agitate among the Polish population.

[138] This document is reproduced in its entirety in Gnatowski, "Dokumenty o stosunku radzieckiego kierownictwa do polskiej konspiracji niepodległościowej na północno-wschodnich Kresach Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1943–1944," *Studia Podlaskie,* no. 5 (1995): 233–45 (in Russian), at p. 243, and also in part (in Polish) in Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 244–45, and Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza,* 208–209.

The Soviets unleashed what historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz has aptly called "revolutionary banditry," a strategy that was adopted by the Communist underground throughout occupied Poland.[139] Moreover, their goal—which was cast in a duplicitous web—was to eliminate any independent Polish underground in the area. In fact, the Soviets would not even tolerate the existence of Polish units within the Soviet partisan structures. The various secret directives issued by the Soviet leadership thus show that Polish fears were not based on paranoia or blind hatred of foreigners on their soil, as some commentators argue, but grounded in a brutal reality—one the Poles had experienced on a daily basis since the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17, 1939. Their suspicion and mistrust of the Soviets was therefore fully justified and spilled over naturally to the Soviet partisan forces and their allies.

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[139] "Revolutionary banditry" entails a two-pronged phenomenon which historian Marek Jan Chodakiewicz identified and defined in the following terms: (1) robbing the civilian population of their food and possessions with the aim of depriving them of a normal livelihood and causing them to flee their stripped villages to join the Communist partisans in the forests; and (2) radicalizing the civilian population by provoking the Germans to employ terror toward it in retaliation for low level assaults carried out by the Communists against German personnel and interests for this very purpose. For a discussion of this topic see Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 1 (1997), 13–36; Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne,* 69–88; and Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955,* 111–18, 327–34. A similar subversive strategy was employed by the Communist underground throughout occupied Poland. The following resolutions were adopted at a meeting of Communist underground leaders held in Siedlce in August of 1943:

> (1) Involve eminent representatives of the Polish intelligentsia to cooperate, or provoke them to take a clear position on communism and the PPR [i.e., the Communist Polish Workers' Party]. In the event of a negative attitude or refusal to do so, eliminate them on your own or by means of denunciation.
> (2) Penetrate Polish independence organizations to a greater extent than to date in order to find people in leadership positions that should be immediately eliminated by denouncing [them] to the G[estapo] or by our own enforcement bodies.
> (3) Enhance sabotage activities of a blatant demonstration and provocation nature under the guise of Polish independence organizations to cause an increase in repression on the part of the Germans and the elimination of Polish fascist organizations with their help.

See Mariusz Bechta, *Rewolucja, mit, bandytyzm: Komuniści na Podlasiu w latach 1939–1945* (Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista; Warsaw: Rachocki i S-ka, 2000), 117–18.

Other historians have drawn the distinction between the goals of Soviet and non-Soviet resistance movements in somewhat different terms, which are not incompatible with the foregoing.

> Consequently, some resistance movements sought to encourage the population into supporting them, rather than coerce it. This was a common characteristic among resistance movements in Western Europe, in the Czech lands and in Poland. A covert 'secret army' approach to resistance employed the kinds of actions that were less likely to provoke fearsome Axis retaliation. Such resistance movements favoured this approach partly because they feared that particularly ferocious retaliation from the occupiers might seriously disrupt the sabotage, intelligence-gathering and other important activities in which they were engaged. Yet it was also because they feared what such ferocity might do to the population in whose name they were ostensibly resisting. …
>
> Soviet partisans, in particular, very often presented a considerably different picture. As the instruments of a ruthless regime, they were far from averse to brutally coercing the population into aiding them. They operated in large areas often very far from their own regions of origin, amid communities with whom they felt no particular affinity. Their callous, sometimes murderous treatment of civilians also reflected the often chronic state of discipline within their own units.

See Philip Cooke and Ben H. Shepherd, eds., *European Resistance in the Second World War* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Praetorian Press/Pen & Sword, 2013), 9–10. Recent research in the Soviet archives has corroborated this stark portrayal of the Soviet partisans. In his book *Stalin's Commandos: Ukrainian Partisans on the Eastern Front* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016), Alexander Gogun presents copious evidence that the Nazi atrocities in Ukraine were often matched by partisan brutality such as the indiscriminate use of scorched-earth tactics, the destruction of their own villages, partisan-generated Nazi reprisals against civilians, and the daily incidents of robbery, drunkenness, rape and bloody internal conflicts that were reported to be widespread among the partisans. He shows that all these practices were not a product of the culture of warfare nor a spontaneous "people's response" to the unremitting brutality of Nazi rule but a specific feature of Stalin's total war strategy.

Behind-the-scenes collaboration between the Gestapo and the NKVD was nothing new and had started well before the war. These two agencies established close contacts in Danzig (Gdańsk) as early as 1935 and together plotted the dismemberment of Poland,[140] which was formally sanctioned under the terms of a Secret Supplementary Protocol to the German-Soviet Frontier and Friendship Treaty of September 28, 1939. Contacts between the two organizations intensified and meetings were called to discuss how best to combat Polish resistance and eradicate Polish national existence. A joint instructional centre for officers of the NKVD and the Gestapo was opened at Zakopane in December 1939. Nor did the Soviets did not shun cooperation with the Gestapo, when it suited their purpose, after being turned on by their erstwhile Nazi allies. By the end of 1941, the Soviets were parachuting agents—such as Paweł (Pinkus) Finder, who was appointed First Secretary of the Soviet-controlled Polish Workers' Party, and Stanisław (Solomon) Kurland—into German-occupied Poland to destabilize the Home Army. One way of doing this was by denouncing Home Army members to the Nazis.[141] The Communist underground infiltrated the archives of the Warsaw office of the delegate of the Polish government in exile and turned over secret files to the Gestapo. In February 1942, together with operatives from the Communist underground, the Gestapo raided the delegate's premises seizing more than a dozen people who were later killed. The documents found there were shared by the Gestapo and Communist underground.[142] The zealousness of pro-Soviet operatives knew no bounds. In Febraury 1944, a Communist agent betrayed two rival underground printing houses in

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[140] Romuald Skorowski, "Polacy, Kaszubi, Niemcy i komuniści," *Głos* (Warsaw), October 22, 29 and November 5, 2005.

[141] Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 103–104; Pełczyński et al., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 3: 261–62; Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 3 (1999), 105 (Lubartów); Leszek Żebrowski, "Gwardia Ludowa," in *Encyklopedia "Białych Plam"* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2002), vol. 7, 190; Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza,* 206–207, 209–214, 343, 377–80; "Spod czerwonej gwiazdy: O podziemiu komunistycznym. Z Piotrem Gontarczykiem, Mariuszem Krzystofińskim i Januszem Marszalcem rozmawia Barbara Polak," *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* nos. 3–4 (March–April 2006): 19–21. See also Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, *"Zwyczajny" resort: Studia o aparacie bezpieczeństwa 1944–1956* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005). These activities were so blatant that, during his trial in June 1954, a Communist partisan declared: "We thought about the fact that ours was an organization that was supposed to be fighting the Germans, but we were murdering Poles and Jews. But we were told that the battle with the reactionary forces [Home Army] and National Armed Forces [NSZ] was more important than the battle with the Germans—that was the surreptitious view of the [Communist] Polish Workers' Party." See Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 3: 56.

[142] Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza,* 378–83. The Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation of Poland's Institute of National Remembrance is currently investigating this matter (Warsaw sygnatura akt S 48/01/Zn).

Warsaw.[143] Yet when the citizens of Warsaw rose up against the German occupiers in August 1944—something Soviet propaganda had urged them to do, the Soviet Army, who had reached the suburb of Praga across the Vistula River, refused pleas for help as some 150,000 Poles perished during the 63-day onslaught. Their local proxies—the Polish Workers' Party and the People's Army—laid plans (as yet premature) to eliminate the leadership and "uncooperative" elements of the Home Army with Soviet help.[144] Characteristically, German Communists were the most privileged group of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps and were notorious for collaborating with the camp authorities.[145] This long tradition of collaboration survived the defeat of Nazi Germany. It was not out of keeping that Heinrich Kassner (Jan Kaszubowski), a former Gestapo agent who had infiltrated the Home Army in Pomerania, became an NKVD agent and joined the security office after the war[146]; that Izydor Reisler (Jerzy Sawicki) sat on the Lawyer's Council in Soviet-occupied Lwów, where he persecuted its Polish members, then became a Gestapo agent in the Lwów ghetto, and finally emerged as a prosecutor of the Supreme National Tribunal and Supreme Court in Stalinist Poland, where he oversaw the prosecution of war criminals[147]; or that Danek Redlich followed the same path as, successively, a Bolshevik agent in Soviet-occupied Lwów, a Gestapo agent in German-occupied Kraków, where he denounced Stanisław Taubenschlag, a scion of a

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[143] Leszek Żebrowski, "Szczerzy komuniści lubili donosić: z dziejów konspiracyjnej PPR 1942–1944," *Gazeta Polska* (Warsaw), February 2, 1995; Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 2, 197 (the Soviet-Gestapo connection is documented at pp. 195–222); Leszek Żebrowski, "Działalność tzw. band pozorowanych jako metoda zwalczania podziemia niepodległościowego w latach 1944–1947," in Roman Bäcker, et al., *Skryte oblicze systemu komunistycznego: U źródeł zła…* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo im. Stanisława ze Skarbimierza, and DiG, 1997), 76; Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza,* 205–6. See also Janusz Marszalec, "Pomyłka, której nie było: Sprawa rzekomego zadenuncjowania przez wywiad Armii Ludowej własnej drukarni przy ul. Grzybowskiej w Warszawie w lutym 1944 r.," in Błażej Brzostek, Jerzy Eisler, Dariusz Jarosz, Krzysztof Kosiński, and Tadeusz Wolsza, eds., *Niepiękny wiek XX* (Warsawa: Instytut Historii Polskiej Akademii Nauk and Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2010), 181–94, and Piotr Gontarczyk, "Pomyłka, która raczej była: Jeszcze raz o wpadce komunistycznej drukarni przy ulicy Grzybowskiej," *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN-u,* forthcoming.

[144] Davies, *Rising '44,* 318–19; Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL–Al i PPR*, vol. 2, 244–51.

[145] This is the assessment of Insa Eschebach, museum director at the former Ravensbrück camp for womem. German Communists were the most frequent users of the camp's brothels, which were staffed with female prisoners lured with false promises of freedom. See Piotr Zychowicz, "Piętnaście minut w bloku 24: Domy publiczne w obozach śmierci," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), July 21, 2007.

[146] Szczepan Surdy, "Prosto w oczy: Porucznik Dambek i inni," *Nasz Dziennik,* March 17, 2004; Romuald Skorowski, "Polacy, Kaszubi, Niemcy i komuniści," *Głos* (Warsaw), October 22, 29 and November 5, 2005. These articles are based on Agnieszka Pryczkowska and Alfons Pryczkowski's monograph *Tajna Organizacja Wojskowa "Gryf Kaszubski–Gryf Pomorski": Geneza. Obsada personalna w kierownictwie. Prześladowania powojenne.*

[147] Zbigniew Błażyński, *Mówi Józef Światło: Za kulisami bezpieki i partii 1940–1955,* Third revised edition (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1986), 138, 228; *Słownik biograficzny działaczy polskiego ruchu robotniczego,* Second revised and expanded edition (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1993), vol. 3 (entry for Sawicki, Jerzy).

prominent Jewish family (his father, Rafał Taubenschlag, was dean of the Jagiellonian University), while on a mission for the Polish underground, and as an employee of the security office in Stalinist Poland.[148]

From the outset, the Soviet partisans operating in northeastern Poland, especially those with direct links to the NKVD, had as their task the undermining and destruction of the non-Communist underground in that area. To accomplish this they resorted to passing on to the Germans lists of members of the Polish underground and engaged in other forms of behind-the-scenes collaboration with the Gestapo, German gendarmerie and local police.[149] A special unit of the Kirov Brigade operating in the Wołożyn area, posing as a Belorussian self-defence organization, provided to the Gebietskommissar in Lida a list of 33 Home Army members in the fall of 1943. Their aim was twofold: to denounce Polish activists and to incite animosity between Poles and Belorussians.[150] Soviet partisans in northeastern Poland proved not to be an ally in the fight against the Germans, but an enemy whose real and increasingly overt aim was the destruction of the Polish independentist underground and the renewed takeover of these lands.

This reality was not lost on those who, for whatever reason and sometimes for want of any other option, aligned themselves with the Soviets. Indeed, many Jews—former Polish citizens who had witnessed the wholesale destruction of Jewish communal life and institutions during the first Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland in 1939–1941—became intensely loyal to the Soviet Union, even if they were not personally committed to the Communist ideology. Tuvia Bielski, for example, vividly recalled a speech he delivered to Jewish partisans as commander of the Zhukov unit: "Moreover, if you are a true Soviet citizen you must know that our Motherland requires that we struggle together against the German-fascist enemy."[151] They should not, therefore, feign surprise that they found themselves on a collision course with the Polish population and its underground authorities who remained loyal to Poland's government in exile.

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[148] Stanisław Taubenschlag (Stanley Townsend), *To Be a Jew in Occupied Poland: Cracow, Auschwitz, Buchenwald* (Oświęcim: Frap Books, 1998), 49–57.

[149] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Antyakowskie specjalne wydziały i wywiad baranowickiego zgrupowania partyzantki sowieckiej," in Bogusław Polak, ed., *Zbrodnie NKWD na obszarze województw wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej* (Koszalin: Wyższa Szkoła Inżynierska w Koszalinie, Instytut Zarządzenia i Marketingu, Katedra Nauk Humanistycznych, 1995), 268; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 115. See also Erdman, *Droga do Ostrej Bramy,* 241–42; and Prawdzic-Szlaski, *Nowogródczyzna w walce 1940–1945,* 193, who describes, on pp. 92–93, Polish retaliations directed at a Communist organization working closely with the Gestapo; Adam Walczak, *13. Brygada Armii Krajowej Okręgu Wileńskiego* (Bydgoszcz: Towarzystwo Miłośników Wilna i Ziemi Wileńskiej, 2002), 55.

[150] Gasztold, "Sowietyzacja i rusyfikacja Wileńszczyzny i Nowogródczyzny w działalności partyzantki sowieckiej w latach 1941–1944," in Sudoł, *Sowietyzacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej po 17 września 1939,* 279.

[151] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 353. Another effusive outpouring by Bielski recorded shortly after the war went: "You are not a true Bolshevik if you think of me as a Jew. We both come from Russia. Let us work together and fight together." See Marie Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match: The Story of Jewish Resistance* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 258.

4. The Spiral Begins

Already in mid–1942, Soviet partisans were sporadically murdering members of the Polish elite, including the landed gentry and intelligentsia. The scale of these murders grew to include Home Army delegates sent to meet with the Soviets as well as hundreds of family members of Home Army men and women.[152] Ordinary civilians also fell victim to atrocities, revenge actions, and deceitful tactics at the hands of Soviet partisans, as demonstrated by the following characteristic cases described by Jewish partisans.

After escaping to the Naliboki forest, Abraham Shmulivitz joined the Stalin Brigade. The leader of his detachment and the sergeant who was second in command were Russian POWs who had escaped from a German prison camp. One night in January or February 1943, they went to dynamite a railway junction near Iwie (Iwje) but found it heavily guarded by Germans. The leader said he knew of a nearby Polish farmer with two beautiful daughters and took his troop there. While the detachment waited outside the farm house, the leader and sergeant spent an hour raping the farmer's daughters. The detachment then moved to another farm to wait until they could mount their attack on the junction again. They left footprints in the snow but didn't worry because the abused girls had been warned they would be killed if they told the Germans. One of the girls did not heed this warning and, quite understandably, reported what had happened. Equipped with skis and white camouflage, the Germans pursued the partisan detachment, caught up with them and killed most of them. The remnants made their way back to the partisan base where the leader reported that a farmer had betrayed them, without disclosing why. The partisan command ordered that the family be killed in reprisal for betraying the partisans. And so the Soviet partisans murdered the entire family of "collaborators" and burned down their farmhouse.[153]

Abother member of the Stalin Brigade, Rubin or Boris Segalowicz (later Segal), recounts his activities both as part of a smaller Jewish group operating in the Nowogródek area and as part of the Stalin Brigade.

> [In] 1942, when he was separated from the bigger partisan brigade and was just with a group of fourteen [Jews]. They went into a village looking for Germans. One of the villages said that there were none, but the Germans were actually in hiding and ended up wounding many of the partisans. A few weeks later, the partisans returned to the village and burned half of it.
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> The partisans took whatever they wanted from people who [allegedly] cooperated with the Germans (he says they did not take anything from those who did not). They would take food, clothing, horses, ammunition, and pigs; they took whatever they saw.[154]

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[152] Examples can be found in Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 98–100, 115.

[153] Allen S. (Allen Small, formerly Abraham Meyer Shmulivitz) Holocaust Testimony (HVT–833), interviewed December 14, 1986 and March 1, 1987, Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies, Yale University Library. See also the testimony of Allen Small, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, University of Southern California, Interview code 7311. After the arrival of the Soviet army, Allen Small entered the police force and pusued alleged Nazi "collaborators."

[154] Interview with Rubin Segal, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. Segalowicz's wife states that after the liberation they resided in Iwie (Iwje), where Rubin joined a special brigade that helped fight Poles who were against the Soviet regime. Interview with Chaya Segal, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

Ura Kaplan, a native of Świerzeń Nowy who served with the Shchors detachment of the Chapayev Brigade, participated in a "combat mission" that entailed confiscating food from alleged collaborators. The Soviet partisans dressed in German uniforms for this task.

> I was sent with other fighters on a combat mission. We were tasked to collect food from villagers who had collaborated with the Germans. We were presented with the details of the farm, where one such German henchman was supposedly living. On discovering the farmhouse, we found a rich Polish man living there. We decided the best course of action would be to 'redistribute' his much-needed livestock. To our surprise, he pleaded with us, saying: 'Please, don't touch me. I'm hiding a Jewish woman.' Cautious, in case it was an ambush, we said, 'Show us the Jewish woman.' The man led us to a barn, where, underneath the floor, was a hiding place covered with a bale of hay. Who should come out of the hiding place, but my cousin Ida! I hadn't known that she had survived, because her family had been taken away on the same day as my own family. Ida took one look at us and began screaming. To disguise ourselves, we were dressed in German uniforms, and she thought we were policemen. In her fear, she did not even recognize me. No matter how we tried to persuade her to leave with us, and return with us to the squad, she flatly refused. Eventually, I had to leave her on the farm, in hiding, and go back to the detachment. I relayed the story to my commander, and he appointed a group to return to the farm, and bring Ida to the squad. After this, my cousin was finally convinced. She remained with us, contributing to the squad fully, as a cook, until Byelorussia was liberated.[155]

Moshe Yudewitz (later Moris Sorid), the deputy commander of the Malenkov detachment of the Chapayev Brigade which was active near Kobryń, in Polesie (Polesia), recalled the fear that ordinary villagers felt when their villages were raided by Soviet partisans.

> The boys began their work of gathering items of needed food, and I entered the house where Pauk's aunt lived with her family. The woman was scared to death, when she saw three armed partisans. Although the farmers were always afraid of the Germans, they were sometimes afraid of the partisans, too. In many cases, … partisans didn't behave politely. They could be brutal, not only demanding food or clothes, but also misbehaving sexually and abusively.[156]

Harold Zissman (Hersh Cukierman) belonged to a Soviet partisan unit that forayed south of Grodno masquerading as the Home Army. Their plan was to rob the farmers and thereby incite them against the Polish underground.

> We would be impersonating White Poles, and to that end we were outfitted in Polish Army uniforms. …

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[155] Ura Kaplan, "I Saw for Myself but I Still Don't Believe," in Bronstein and Demby, *We Remember Lest the World Forget,* 94–99, at pp. 97–98, Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/weremember/files/WeRemember.pdf>.

[156] Morris Sorid, *One More Miracle: The Memoirs of Morris* Sorid ([United States]: Jonathan Sorid, 2007), 80.

> Each group was also to "bomb" the farm of a local collaborator [sic]—that is, raid his house for clothing and other supplies for the entire group. …
>
> I was with Sergey, Valodya, the two local Jewish fighters, and a few other local men. … When carrying out "bombings," we impersonated Polish Underground fighters, the point being to discredit the White Poles with the farmers. From the farms, besides food and clothing, we took naphtha, saws, and axes—the farmers would miss these things most of all.[157]

One of the most heinous episodes was the "pacification" of town of Naliboki, located in Naliboki forest (Puszcza Nalibocka). The fate of inhabitants of this town, caught between the Germans and Soviets, was particularly tragic. On June 9, 1942, the Stalin Brigade mounted a successful ambush on a German commando that passed through Naliboki while carrying out operations directed against Jews in the area. Nineteen German policemen and Lithuanian and Belorussian auxiliaries were killed, some of them captured and subjected to torture, while the Soviets incurred no losses. In retaliation, the Germans executed a number of townspeople and pacified surrounding villages suspected of supporting the partisans. The Germans dispatched a large force of soldiers to Naliboki to clear the area of partisans. Soviet partisans attacked the German forces in Naliboki on July 24, 1942 but were repelled, suffering heavy losses (some 30–35 Soviet partisans were killed). During the clash a church and several other buildings were destroyed in the town.[158]

Israeli historian Shalom Cholawsky, a former partisan with the Zhukov battalion, states that a group of fugitives from the Nowogródek ghetto was charged with the task of seizing the police headquarters during an assault on Naliboki, likely the one in July 1942 described above. Cholawsky puts the following spin on that episode:

> In the partisan attack on Naliboky [Naliboki], in which the Jewish unit was given the task of taking the police headquarters, all its members fell in battle because they received no assistance or support from the other units participating in the battle.[159]

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[157] Harold Zissman, *The Warriors: My Life As a Jewish Soviet Partisan* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 145, 149.

[158] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1941,* 207–8; Wacław Nowicki, *Żywe echa* (Komorów: Antyk, 1993), 80–87; Mieczyslaw Klimowicz, *The Last Day of Naliboki: The Untold Story Behind the Massacre* (Baltimore: American Literary Press, 2009), 183–97.

[159] Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II,* 108. See also ibid., 139. The Jewish fugitives from the Nowogródek ghetto headed by the Judenrat chairman Daniel Ostaszyński (Ostashynsky) did not join the Home Army, as alleged by Cholawsky, but the Bielski group. See Tec, *Defiance,* 177, 263. If they participated in the attack on Naliboki, it was as part of the latter group. Another survivor claims that a group of Jews left Nowogródek after the first massacre in December 1941 to join a Polish underground group, supposedly of the Home Army, in Naliboki forest but were disarmed and sent back to the ghetto. See Lubow, *Escape,* 29. However, there was no such Polish underground group in Naliboki forest at that time, and the Home Army did not yet field permanent partisan units. This unsubstantiated account is repeated as fact by Jewish historians such as Bauer, "Nowogródek—The Story of a *Shtetl*," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 35, no 2 (2007): 52–53.

Other hagiographic Jewish accounts, however, present significantly different variations on seemingly the same assault.[160]

The following year, in May 1943, it was the Soviet partisans' turn to pacify Naliboki. The purpose of that operation was to eliminate a nascent Home Army outpost in that town. Acting on German orders, the

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[160] According to Yehoshua Yofe, "Jewish Bravery," in Eliezer Yerushalmi, ed., *Navaredok Memorial Book,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Novogrudok/Novogrudok.html>, 354 ff.; translation of *Pinkas Navaredok* (Tel Aviv: Navaredker Relief Committee in the USA and Israel, 1963),

> Isrolik from Iveniec [Iwieniec] was 18 years old. … his township was surrounded by forests. The village houses stood in the forests. The Germans never came there. There were no made roads in the vicinity. The peasants were friendly toward the Jews and were hostile to the Germans, who were aiming to conquer the world. In the forests there were already Russian partisans. … [Isrolik convinced about twenty young Jews to escape from the ghetto in Nowgródek to the forest where they met up with the Soviet partisans.]
>
> They were planning, together with the Russian partisans, to attack the German police post in Naliboki. The murderers of the Jews from the townships were stationed there and the partisans were eager to revenge their deaths. The policemen were barricaded in the local church. The township was occupied by the partisans, but they could not get into the church. The partisans attacked from two sides—the Russians from one side and the Jews from the other. They were shooting at the policemen from the trenches. Suddenly the policemen stopped shooting, as if they had run out of bullets. The partisans were told to attack and get into the church. The Jewish boys were waiting for this. They aimed to capture the policemen alive, capture them and ask them why they were killing local Jews, who were in the past their neighbours and friends. Suddenly they heard the sound of approaching trucks, which were driven at great speed. The trucks arrived in Naliboki and the Germans started shooting. The bullets rained down on the partisans, who left the trenches and were about to enter the church. They did not realise that the Russian partisans escaped from the township and had left them behind. The policemen in the church suddenly started firing. And then the shooting stopped. The Germans announced through a megaphone: 'lay down your arms and we will not kill you, we will take you back to the Novogrudok [Nowogródek] Ghetto'. The Germans were certain that the Jews would surrender. They did not believe that Ghetto Jews were able to fight. They must be frightened and would give up the fight. But the Jews had other ideas, though they saw death approaching. They escaped from the Ghetto to avoid death. To go back to the Ghetto to be killed there did not make sense. It was better to die fighting. It was better to see some Germans die. They started to shoot at the enemy. Some German trucks were destroyed. The Jews continued shooting. They were shooting, were silenced and silently they died. Their enemy was manifold [sic]. The partisans ran out of ammunition and died knowing that they did not surrender. The story of the fight had become known among the partisans: some twenty Jews have opposed hundreds of Germans and they did not surrender. They fought to the last—the fight for freedom and justice.

The Nowogródek memorial book also lists Mordechi (Meme) Cherny as having fallen at the beginning of 1942, while fighting German guards in the town of Naliboki. Ibid., 357 ff.

Another source—Ben-Ir, "The First Partisan from Karelitz," based on the Korelitz (or Korelicze) Memorial Book and reproduced in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 2 (1985), 588—states:

> A group of partisan Jews and non-Jews, among them David Lipshitz [from Korelicze], and his friend Moyshke Funt from Ivenitz [Iwieniec] took over the town of Nalibocki [Naliboki]. Their goal was to take over the police station. The Germans from Ivenitz were tipped off and surrounded Nalibocki. The partisans fortified themselves in the church. They fought heroically to the last bullet, and did not surrender to the Germans. David Lipshitz and Moyshke Funt fell in battle.

Entries for Dawid Lipszyc (David Lipshitz) of the Stalin battalion and Mosze Funt (Moyshke Funt) of the Chapaev batttalion are found in the website of the Partisans, Ghetto Fighters and Jewish Undergrounds in Israel, Internet: <http://www.partisans.org.il>.

According to a 1996 interview with Rubin Segal, then a member of the Stalin Brigade known as Boris Segalowicz, found in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives,

> When he joined the group, there were about 85–90 men, 40 of whom were Jewish. The commander was a Jew from Minsk. … One time they ambushed a town called Naliboki. The commander called all the Jews in the group and told them to do the best they could when they went to fight because if they did well, they might be able to get more Jews to join the partisans. The Jews entered the town first and began fighting the Germans. The other partisans did not join the fight because they got a report that a lot of Germans were coming from Naliboki. The other partisans left but the Jews continued to fight. All but two of them were killed. The two who survived were taken captive. The two men who were captured alive were cut to pieces by the Germans.

residents had formed a self-defence group to fend off marauders. Gradually, the group was transformed into a clandestine organization with connections to the Polish underground. In Soviet eyes, their chief "crime" was that they had rebuffed overtures from the Soviet partisan command to fall into line.[161] The surprise Soviet assault on Naliboki occurred in the early morning hours of May 8, 1943. One hundred and thirty (or 128 by some counts) innocent civilians, among them women and children, were butchered in a pogrom which lasted several hours. Some residents were killed in their beds, others were dragged out of their homes and executed individually or in groups. Buildings were ransacked and set on fire throughout the town.

There is no question that there were many Jews among the large Soviet forces that attacked Naliboki. A Soviet document (dated June 2, 1943) states that Iosif Shimanovich (Szymonowicz), who hailed from the town of Naliboki, was to lead a group of partisans from the Dzerzhinsky detachment of the Stalin Brigade to the town for the assault.[162] Another Jewish account—grossly exaggerated and inaccurate (as no Germans were present in Naliboki at the time)—states:

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[161] According to Kazimierz Krajewski, the foremost authority on the topic, a self-defence group was created in Naliboki in August 1942, at the urging of the Germans, after an assault on German forces by Soviet partisans, in order to avoid a threatened "pacification" of this small town by the Germans. After the Belorussian police outpost was closed, the townspeople were given a small quantity of rifles (around 22) and told to guard the town against marauding bands and to ensure the delivery of food quotas imposed on the farmers. The self-defence group did not engage in armed confrontations with Soviet partisans. In March and April of 1943, Eugeniusz Klimowicz, the leader of the self-defence unit and clandestine Home Army commander, met with Major Rafail Vasilevich, a Soviet partisan commander. The Soviets began to exert pressure on the Poles to leave their posts and join the Soviet partisans in the forest, but this did did not sway Klimowicz. Both sides reached a non-aggression agreement whereby the town and the surrounding settlements were to remain under Polish control. When the self-defence group was summoned to the nearby village of Nieścierowicze to fend off marauders, two of its members were wounded. The local Soviet command did not question the validity of such interventions. (The Soviets also ordered the Bielski group to take food only from specified villages —see Duffy, the Bielski Brothers, 112, 166.) For a somewhat different version of the history of the self-defence group see Klimowicz, *The Last Day of Naliboki,* 198–212. However, the morning of May 8, 1943, a surprise attack on Naliboki was launched by the Stalin Brigade, under the command of Major Vasilevich, with the participation of the Bielski detachment. The Soviets murdered some 130 people, including three women, a teenage boy and 10-year-old child. Most of the victims were actual or presumed members of the self-defence group who were targeted for execution. The town was pilfered and a large part of it, including the church, school, and municipal buildings, was burned to the ground. The townspeople were accused of collaboration with the Germans because, during the assault, a visiting Belorussian policeman had fired a shot at a Soviet commissar. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 387–88. See also Komisja Historyczna Polskiego Sztabu Głównego w Londynie, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej,* vol. 3: *Armia Krajowa,* 529; Polskie Siły Zbrojne, Armia Krajowa, *Drogi cichociemnych: Opowiadania zebrane i opracowane przez Koło Spadochroniarzy Armii Krajowej* (London: Veritas, 1954), 133, translated into English as Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent: Adventures from the Underground Movement Narrated by Paratroops of the Polish Home Army* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1954), 144; Antoni Bogusławski's afterword in Łopalewski, *Między Niemnem a Dźwiną,* 245; Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszczy,* 135; Wacław Nowicki, *Żywe echa* (Komorów: Antyk, 1993), passim; Wacław Nowicki, "W imię prawdy o żołnierzach AK: List otwarty do prof. A. Hackiewicza," *Słowo–Dziennik Katolicki,* August 11, 1993; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Rozbrojenie," *Karta,* no. 16 (1995): 127; Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 102; Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 3, 251, 253; Gasztold, "Sowietyzacja i rusyfikacja Wileńszczyzny i Nowogródczyzny w działalności partyzantki sowieckiej w latach 1941–1944," in Sudoł, *Sowietyzacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej po 17 września 1939,* 277–78, 281–82; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 100–101; Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955,* 328; Leszek Żebrowski, "Naliboki," in *Encyklopedia "Białych Plam"* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2003), vol. 12: 264–69.

[162] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 191. Even though Shimanovich was from the area, he got lost and the partisans arrived late, for which he was reprimanded by the partisan command. Some Jewish members of the Stalin Brigade belonged to Zorin's partisan unit.

> After one battle, after killing hundreds of Poles and Germans, the partisans took three Germans and ten Poles captive. The partisans took all their ammunition and food from the village. The commander had Boris [Rubin Segalowicz, later Segal, a member of the Stalin Brigade] speak to the Germans (since he could speak Yiddish). He said to them, "I'll do to you what you have done to me." He took his knife and cut one of their arms and put salt on it. The German begged Boris to kill him. Eventually all the prisoners were killed.[163]

What is in dispute is whether members of the Bielski group were among the assailants. Confusion about this matter was unavoidable in the circumstances. A number of Jewish fugitives from Naliboki had joined the Soviet partisans, among them: Boris Rubin (Rubizhewski), Izaak (Itsek) Rubizhewski, Israel Kesler, Iosif Shimanovich (Szymonowicz), Akiva or Kiva Szymonowicz (Shimanovich), Mikhail or Michel Makhlis (Michal Mechlis), Abraham Viner (Avram Wajner), Avram Kibovich, Chaim Szlusberg (Shlesberg), Israel Shlesberg, Pnina Szlusberg Szmidt (Perla Shlesberg), Israel Bolotnicki, Tevel Bolotnicki, Aizik Bunimovich, Abram Shmuilovich, Leah Shmuilovich, Choina Shklut, and Chona Pressman.[164] However, it was not clear to the local population what detachment they belonged to at any given time, although most of them eventually became part of the Bielski group. Some of them did take part on the assault on Naliboki. It is understandable, therefore, that the residents of the town who survived the massacre by hiding could not identify them by name when questioned sixty years after the events, but simply considered them to be Bielski partisans. After all, the assailants did not leave calling cards.

According to Wacław Nowicki, who lived through those events, the formations that did most of the pillaging and murdering were the "Pobeda" detachment[165] and the Bielski partisans, who later established their base and family camp, known as "Jerusalem," in Naliboki forest.

> It was 4:30, perhaps five at night. I was awoken by a powerful boom. A long burst of shots from an automatic rifle blanketed the cottage. Bullets pierced the beams through and flew above our beds. A bullet lodged in the wall a few centimetres above my head. I heard screams. We barricaded ourselves in the house, but the assailants ran further towards the centre of Naliboki. …
>
> What we saw when the partisans left was beyond human comprehension. Burned down buildings. Piles of corpses. Mostly rifle-shot wounds, smashed heads, lifeless eyes staring in horror. Among those killed I noticed a schoolmate. …
>
> Jews who lived among us before the war stood out among the assailants. They knew perfectly well where everyone lived and who was who. …

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[163] Interview with Rubin Segal, 1996, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. A Polish resident of Naliboki states that a Jewish woman from the Soviet Union was among the attackers. See Klimowicz, *The Last Day of Naliboki,* 214, 217.

[164] Entries for some of these partisans can be found in the website of the Partisans, Ghetto Fighters and Jewish Undergrounds in Israel, Internet: < http://www.partisans.org.il>. See also "Partisans of the Bielski Detachment," which lists 1190 partisans by name (in the author's possession).

[165] For information on the Pobeda detachment of the Lenin Brigade see Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 63–64.

> This was a group of degenerate bandits, and not any partisans. Their main occupation was robbery and murder. Often they also committed rapes. They raped one of my neighbours. Her father, whom they forced to watch this at gunpoint, was told: "Don't worry, after the war we will come and get married." During an assault they shot Antoni Korżenko, my godfather's brother, when he did not want to hand over his horses.[166]
>
> Everyone was in tears. The plunderers did not omit a single homestead. Something was taken from everyone. Because he resisted, they killed the father of my schoolmate and cousin, Marysia Grygorcewicz. The "soldiers of Pobeda" and "Jerusalemites" took with them the pigs and chickens which they shot, flour, as well as other provisions. They wanted to live! But they took the lives of others. They did not come to fight. …
>
> In the space of almost two hours, 128 innocent people died, the majority of them, as eyewitnesses later testified, at the hands of the Bielski and "Pobeda" assassins.[167]

Residents of Naliboki who survived the attack make it clear that the assailants did not simply target the organizers of the local self-defence, who were few in number, but also the civilian population and burned down half the town in the process. Wacław Chilicki states: "They followed their noses and burst into cottages. Everyone they came across along the way they killed in cold blood. No one was shown mercy." Bolesław Chmara, then 15 years old, recalled: "They summoned my brother, who was three years older than me, out to the porch. He came out. There was a woman among them. She raised her rifle and shot him right in the chest. It was a dumdum bullet that ripped his entire arm off. She shrugged her shoulders, turned around on her heel, and they moved on. They robbed what they could and reduced the cottage to ashes."[168] The presence of women is a strong indication that there were Jews among the assailants, since there were very few non-Jewish women in the Soviet partisan movement in this area.

Maria Chilicka (née Grygorcewicz) described the events as follows:

> Neither my father nor our tenant nor our neighbours were organizers [of the self-defence]. They robbed us first. They told my father to harness his horse to his wagon and then told him to load onto it whatever was in the granary: flour, buckwheat, lard, smoked and raw meat. While my father was loading the wagon one of them struck him with the butt of a gun so that he would load faster. When the wagon was loaded they told my father to stand by the wall of the granary and they wanted to shoot him. We started to plead with them. At this time our tenant came out of the house so they told my father to remove his shoes. They led our tenant, Albert Farbatka, from the courtyard to the street and shot him near the gate. The bullet did not go through his forehead but pierced his

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[166] Cited in Piotr Zychowicz, "Bohater w cieniu zbrodni," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), June 16, 2007. Wacław Nowicki also recalled how, in February 1940, local Jews assisted the NKVD in identifying former state officials and military people among the Polish residents for deportation to the Gulag. The assault on Antoni Korżenko is noted in a Soviet report. See Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland*, 201.

[167] Nowicki, *Żywe echa,* 98, 100.

[168] Cited in Piotr Zychowicz, "Bohater w cieniu zbrodni," *Rzeczpospolita* (Warsaw), June 16, 2007.

cheeks and he fell to the ground. I can't say exactly why they didn't finish him off since I ran to rescue our cows because our cowshed was already on fire. Our pigsty with our pigs was burning down completely. When I was chasing the cows into the field one of the men with a torch went to set fire to the barn, and afterwards set fire to the granary and houses. They also killed our neighbour and burned his property. His body was also charred because there was no one to pull him away from his house. He left behind six children between the ages of twelve and one. The bandits just kept yelling "kill the *belak* [White Pole] and let him rot," and they didn't spare anyone. …

Before the self-defence group [was formed] armed intruders would enter homes in broad daylight and take clothing as well. A female intruder told my sister to open her wardrobe and took whatever she wanted. … If anyone would try not to give it to them then they would take what they wanted and destroy the rest so that nothing remained. They spared no one and nothing. … I do not know why they exacted such revenge on us. Perhaps because we fed them? Our family helped to hide a Jew from Mir named Kaplan. He didn't stay in our house, but we provided him with food. … After they burned us down and we ourselves had nothing to eat, he went to the partisans. … Another Jew, a dentist who used to work in our hospital, stayed with us for three months. … Once the Germans came to us and demanded a bicycle and started to search our buildings. My mother was really afraid that they would enter our house and asked him to leave the house for a while. But he didn't leave, and simply moved from one end of the house to the other … When my mother saw him she got upset and told him to leave a little more abruptly. He left right away. When the Germans left he came and took his documents and left … If they had found him in our house they would've shot all eight of us …

They [the Soviet partisans] came mostly to the farmers to rob. The worst was when they came or rather assaulted us accompanied by women, then they plundered everything, and when there wasn't what she wanted, they smashed dishes, mirrors, and broke whatever came into their hands. Only once did a Russian come from the forest and not take [things] himself but told us to give him clean undergarments and food. … Not only did they rob but they also killed … Not one of our buildings remained. They took our horse and wagon. … Every family buried their victims. … They killed my 16-year-old cousin Jan Łukaszewicz in 1942 while he was watching his cows … Some Jews took another of my cousins from his home on May 8, 1943 and killed him. They also killed my cousin's husband. They would have killed my father too had our tenant not come out of the house …

The Germans came during the day and carried out round-ups for labour in Germany. … In July there were many Germans and the partisans were afraid of them. They hid deep in the forest. They [the partisans] were heroes [when dealing] with the defenceless population. The Germans deported us on August 6, 1943. … They took us to camps like bandits because the real bandits had hidden in the forest.[169]

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[169] Correspondence from Maria Chilicka, dated March 3, 2004 and February 6, 2005 (in the author's possession). The reference to women partisans undoubtedly refers to Jewish women since there were very few non-Jewish women in the Soviet partisan movement in this area.

The head of the Soviet partisans in the Baranowicze district, Vasilii Chernyshev or Chernishov [Василий Васильевич Чернышёв], known by his *nom de guerre* Major General Platon,[170] dispatched the following report after the assault on Naliboki, in which he grossly exaggerated the accomplishments of the Soviet partisans:

> On the night of May 8, 1943, the partisan detachments "Dzerzhinskii" (commander Shashkin, commissar comrade Lakhov), "Bolshevik" (commander Makaev, commissar comrade Khmelevskii), "Suvorov" (commander Surkev, commissar comrade Klevko) under the command of comrade [Pavel] Gulevich, the commander of the "Stalin" Brigade, and its commissar comrade Muratov as well as the representative of the Iwieniec interregional peace centre, comrade Vasilevich, by surprise destroyed the German garrison of the "self-defence" of the small town of Naliboki. As a result of two-and-a-half hours of fighting 250 members of the self-defence [referred to by its Belorussian name of "samookhova", actually spelled *samaakhova* in Belorussian—*M.P.*] group were killed. We took 4 heavy machine-guns, 15 light machine guns, 4 mortars, 10 automatic pistols, 13 rifles, and more than 20,000 rounds of ammunition (for rifles), and a lot of mines and grenades. We burned down the electrical station, sawmill, barracks, and county office. We took 100 cows and 78 horses. …
>
> I order the leaders of the brigade and partisan detachments to present those distinguished in this battle for state awards.
>
> In this battle our units lost six dead and six wounded. Praise to our brave partisans—patriots of

[170] Vasilii Chernyshev (or Chernyshov), a Communist Party *apparatchik*, was appointed leader of the Soviet partisans in the Baranowicze district by General Panteleimon Ponomarenko, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Belorussia and later chief of general staff of the partisan movement in Western Belarus. Neither Chernyshev nor Ponomarenko had a military background prior to their appointments to those positions. Chernyshov adopted the *nom de guerre* of Major General Platon, a military rank he never actually held.

the Fatherland.[171]

Later Soviet reports about the assault on Naliboki added further embellishments. In fact, there was no German garrison in Naliboki and the local self-defence group had 26 rifles and two light machine guns.[172]

Poland's Institute of National Remembrance arrived at the following preliminary findings after launching an investigation into these events:

> Despite a concluded agreement [of mutual cooperation], in the early morning of May 8, 1943 the Soviet partisans attacked [the town of] Naliboki. They pulled out of houses men who were actual members of the self-defence as well as those who were suspected of belonging to that formation, and shot them near their homes individually or in groups of several or a dozen or more. A portion of the buildings was set on fire and practically everything was taken from the houses—clothing, boots, food—and from the farms—horses and cattle. They [the Soviet partisans] also burned down the church, along with the parish records, school, county seat, post office, and coach house. The attack lasted two to three hours. In total 128 people were killed, mostly men, but the victims also included three women, a teenage boy, and a ten-year-old child. Those killed were buried in the local cemetery. Some members of the self-defence, who were taken by surprise by the attack, attempted to fight and killed a few Soviet partisans, but seeing no chance of success withdrew into the forest. It must be especially underscored that the vast majority of the victims were killed in executions, deliberately and with premeditation, and not by accident. …

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[171] This report from May 10, 1943 is reproduced, in Polish translation, in Gasztold, "Sowietyzacja i rusyfikacja Wileńszczyzny i Nowogródczyzny w działalności partyzantki sowieckiej w latach 1941–1944," in Sudoł, *Sowietyzacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej po 17 września 1939,* 281–82. See also Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 88. The local Home Army commander, Eugeniusz Klimowicz, was charged with various crimes in Stalinist Poland directed at "Fascist-Nazi criminals," among them with the murder of Soviet partisans. He was brought to trial before a military tribunal in Warsaw in October 1951 and sentenced to death. His death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. In 1957, after the death of Stalin, his conviction was overturned and the proceeding against him was eventually discontinued for lack of evidence. Klimowicz described the events leading up to the pacification of Naliboki in a petition for clemency, dated May 30, 1956, forwarded to the head of the Supreme Military Tribunal. See letter to: Ob. Prezesa Najwyższego Sądu Wojskowego w Warszawie, sygnatura Akt Sr 749/51. In his petition, Klimowicz mentions that Jews detained in Naliboki were all released unharmed after brief interrogations, including one Chaja Szymonowicz, who had denounced Klimowicz during the Soviet occupation. The reality was that any Polish partisan suspected of conspiring against or engaging in armed confrontation with Soviet partisans during the German occupation was branded a Nazi collaborator in the postwar Stalinist period and libel to put on trial and sentenced to death or a long term of imprisonment for that reason alone. See, for example, Borodziewicz, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK,* 104 n.7, 194 n.6, 200, 260.

Klimowicz's testimony about the conduct of some local Jews during that period is borne out by other witnesses. A rabble of pro-Soviet Jews and Belorussians came to arrest the Catholic pastor of Naliboki, Rev. Józef Bajko, in September 1939, intending either to hand him over to the Soviet authorities or to possibly lynch him (as had been done in other localities). A large gathering of parishioners foiled these plans, allowing Rev. Bajko to escape before the arrival of the NKVD. See Wierzbicki, *Polacy i Białorusini w zaborze sowieckim,* 115. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, reportedly an unnamed priest, who allegedly was known as a notorious anti-Semite, intervened on behalf of Jews in Naliboki who were beset by local bands. See Cholawsky, *The Jews of Bielorussia during World War II,* 272. Rev. Bajko assisted Jews in other ways during the German occupation and he and his vicar, Rev. Józef Baradyn, were locked in a barn and burned alive in August 1943 on suspicion of helping Jews and partisans. See Wacław Zajączkowski, *Martyrs of Charity,* Part One (Washington, D.C.: St. Maximilian Kolbe Foundation, 1987), Entry 378.

[172] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 89.

> Soviet partisans from the Second Concentration of the Iwieniec zone, commanded by Grigorii Sidoruk [Sidorok, *nom de guerre* General] "Dubov," were active in the region of the Naliboki forest. That concentration formed part of the Baranowicze Partisan Concentration.
>
> Soviet partisans from the following detachments took part in the assault on Naliboki: "Dzerzhinskii," "Bolshevik," and "Suvorov," commanded by Pavel Gulevich, the commander of the Stalin Brigade, and Major Rafail Vasilevich. Jewish partisans from the unit commanded by Tuvia Bielski were among the assailants.[173]

Oddly, these exploits are missing from testimonies of the Bielski group and academic and popular writings about them.[174] The only Jewish accounts that may describe these events (as there was no other comparable massacre in that area), though in manner that is almost beyond recognition, are those of Sulia and Boris Rubin (Rubizhewski). The Rubins claim that it was Boris Rubin's group, under the command of Israel Kesler, who actually masterminded an assault similar in scope to that of Naliboki, on an unnamed

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[173] The Naliboki massacre is under investigation by the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation of the Institute of National Remembrance. Anna Gałkiewicz, the prosecutor heading the investigation in the Regional Commission in Łódź (Oddziałowa Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Łodzi), issued summary reports of the investigation on September 5, 2002 and May 15, 2003, titled respectively, "Śledztwo w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych przez partyzantów radzieckich na żołnierzach Armii Krajowej i ludności cywilnej na terenie powiatów Stołpce i Wołożyn" and "Omówienie dotychczasowych ustaleń w śledztwach w sprawach o zbrodnie w Nalibokach i Koniuchach." These reports are posted online at <https://www.ipn.gov.pl>. The quotation in the text is taken from the more recent of these reports. A subsequent communiqué, "Komunikat dot. śledztwa w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych przez partyzantów sowieckich w latach 1942–1944 na terenie byłego województwa nowogródzkiego," dated June 19, 2008, appears to distance itself from the original position that partisans from the Bielski group participated in the assault. Subsequent reports on the investigation issued by the Institute of National Remembrance state that Jewish partisans did take part in the massacre and that some of them are known by name, but their detachment is not named. See Oddziałowa Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Łodzi, "Śledztwo w sprawie zbrodni popełnionych przez partyzantów radzieckich na żołnierzach Armii Krajowej i ludności cywilnej na terenie powiatów Stołpce i Wołożyn woj. Nowogródzkie (S 17.2001.Zk)," December 21, 2009 and May 2018, Internet: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/sledztwa/sledztwa/oddzialowa-komisja-w-lo/31487,Sledztwa-w-toku.html>.

[174] According to information from former Soviet-Jewish partisans, it was widely held that the Bielski group took part in the massacre. See Jacek Hugo-Bader, "A rewolucja to przecież miała być przyjemność," *Gazeta Wyborcza, Magazyn Gazety* (Warsaw), November 15, 1996. Recently, however, Nechama Tec has dismissed allegations connecting the partisans to the massacre as "total lies." Those allegations, she said, "underline the antisemitic tendencies of the writers and the distortion of history." Robert Bielski, Tuvia Bielski's son, was even more blunt, and characteristic, in his anti-Polish venom: "The Bielskis were not in Naliboki in May of '43. But even if it were true, which I know it's not, the 128 people are in no way close to the millions of people that the Polish people herded towards the Germans so they could be extinguished. I believe it's just a consistent Polish antisemitism and the Poles are sloughing off their own crimes of being an enemy of the Jews during World War II." See Marissa Brostoff, "Polish Investigators Tie Partisans to Massacre," *Forward* (New York), August 7, 2008; reprinted under the heading "Were Jewish Partisans Depicted in New Hollywood Movie Murderers or Heroes?" *Haaertz,* August 10, 2008. On the other hand, Zvi Bielski, the son of Zus (Zizel) Bielski, Tuvia's bother, confided: "The Bielskis, if they had to, would wipe out an entire village as an example not to kill Jews. … these guys were vicious killers when they had to be." See James M. Glass, *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust: Moral Uses of Violence and Will* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 10. At the time, the Bielski group (consisting of some 400 Jews, including about 100 fighters) had their camps in the forests near the villages of Brzozówka (Stara Huta) and Jasionowo, west of Wsielub and northwest of the town of Nowogródek, about 50 kilometres west of Naliboki. However, the armed men, which were organized into fighting squads of eight to ten men each and included a cavalry reconnaissance team, were mobilized for various military tasks as required by the Soviet commanders. See "History of the Formation of the M.I. Kalinin Partisan Detachment," "Jewish Units in the Soviet Partisan Movement: Selected Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 23 (1993): 404–5; Tec, *Defiance,* 104; Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 148–49. Tellingly, over the years, no one has come forward to dispute Boris Rubin's claim of participating in a massacre similar in scope to that of Naliboki, which was aired in the documentary film *The Bielsky Brothers: The Unknown Partisans* already in 1993. This massacre has thus been effectively appropriated by the Bielski partisans.

locality in rather bizarre circumstances.[175] Kesler's group had been incorporated into Tuvia Bielski's much larger forest group around December 1942, and also included Boris's brother Izaak (or Itsek) Rubizhewski. Both the Rubin brothers and Israel Kesler (about whom there is more in Part Three) were natives of

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[175] Sulia Wolozhinski Rubin, who was Boris Rubin's mistress at the time, recorded the following rendition of these events in a memoir which she began to write in the 1960s: "There was a village not far from the ghetto [in Dworzec?] which escaping Jews would have to pass on the way to the forest, or partisans would pass on the way from the woods. These villagers would signal with bells and beat copper pots to alert other villages around. Peasants would run out with axes, sickles—anything that could kill—and would slaughter everybody and then divide among themselves whatever the unfortunate had had. Boris' [Rubizhewski] group decided to stop this once and for all. They sent a few people into the village and lay in ambush on all the roads. Soon enough signaling began and the peasants ran out with their weapons to kill the 'lousy Jews'. Well, the barrage started and they were mown down on all sides. Caskets were made for three days and more than 130 bodies buried. Never again were Jews or partisans killed on those roads." See Sulia Wolozhinski Rubin, *Against the Tide: The Story of an Unknown Partisan* (Jerusalem: Posner & Sons, 1980), 126–27. Sulia Rubin's account is replete with lapses, contains obvious concoctions and lacks important detail (place name, date, chronology, etc.), which is surprising given that her husband, Boris Rubin, hails from Naliboki and would thus have taken part in the massacre of his former neighbours. The reason she gives for the assault is also highly dubious, since there would have been no compelling reason for anyone to have to pass through the isolated town of Naliboki, other than to forage. Moreover, as Soviet sources make quite clear, the decision to launch the assault on Naliboki was not Boris Rubin's or Israel Kesler's, but was entirely in the hands of the Soviet partisan command.

Sulia Rubin gives a markedly different version of those events in the documentary film *The Bielsky Brothers: The Unknown Partisans,* produced by David Herman (Soma Productions, 1993; reissued in 1996 by Films for the Humanities & Sciences). Interviewed with her husband Boris Rubin by her side, she then claimed that the assault on Naliboki was carried out by her husband after he had learned about the alleged gruesome fate of his father at the hands of the villagers: "His father Shlomko … was crucified on a tree … Boris found out. That village doesn't exist anymore. … 130 people they buried that day." Curiously, Sulia Rubin appears to have forgotten that, in her detailed memoir published in 1980, she maintained that Boris's father, Solomon Rubizhewski, had been killed by the Nazis when they liquidated the ghetto in Dworzec, where the Jews from Naliboki were taken by the Germans: "The rest of the people were chased to the ghetto where the Nazis killed Solomon Rubizhewski and his son, Shimon." See Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 123–24. What this documentary film does inadvertently underscore, however, is the true source of the conflict with the local population. As one of the Jewish partisans (interviewed in the film) put it, "The biggest problem was … feeding so many people. Groups of 10 to 12 partisans used to go out for a march of 80 to 90 kilometres, *rob* the villages, and bring food to the partisans." Sulia Rubin's memoir confirms that the Rubizhewski brothers were engaged in forays in the countryside quite frequently. See Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 111–20, 136–37, 143. Soviet reports refer to a partisan from the Bielski group by the name of Itsek Rubezhevskii—Boris (Rubin) Rubizhewski's older brother—as a rapacious plunderer who was caught repeatedly in the act. In response to such activities, the leader of the Frunze Brigade issued a warning that anyone caught robbing in Soviet partisan territory would be executed on the spot. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 85–86.

In his testimony for the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, University of Southern California, Interview code 5800, George Rubin (born Boruch Rubizhewski, later known as Boris) provided more details about these events. Apparently, the events took place in a small village near the "Zhetel" (Zdzięcioł) concentration (labour?) camp. The Germans had taken all the strong people of the village to work in the camp and killed everyone else. The Jewish partisans went to the village to get ammunition. The person they were to meet with ran away and told other villagers about the partisans, who were able to avoid capture by hiding in the forest. The "goyim blew the horn" (sent out an alarm) and gathered people from three or four villages to "Catch the Jews." The partisans laid in wait and let the villagers get close and then opened fire on them. In the end, 130 villagers were killed and were buried on top of one another. It took the partisans two days to bury everyone. The partisans used all their ammunition during this attack. Seemingly, this all took place under Kesler's leadership, before they joined the Bielski group. Afterwards, people were scared of the partisans; they were now able to walk around whenever they wanted without fear of being reported to authorities. Rubin mentions that his father was executed in a concentration camp, and does not allege that he was put to death by villagers like his wife does in the earlier documentary film. This latest testimony is as baffling as the earlier versions. There is no independent information about such a large-scale murder in the area (apart from Naliboki), and none is mentioned in the detailed entry for "Zdzięcioł (Zhetel)" in Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945,* vol. 2, Part B, 1307–9. Besides, why would Jewish partisans spend two days burying 130 villagers whom they had just murdered, thereby exposing themselves to more attacks or being denounced to the German authorities?

Sulia Wolozhinski came from a well-to-do family in Nowogródek; her mother was a dentist who obtained lucrative, and much sought after, contracts from the Polish army. Nechama Tec describes some episodes from the courting of Sulia Wolozhinski: "Boris Rubierzewicki [sic], a brave partisan, a scout, and a regular food collector, would be a good choice. … Boris was interested. As proof of his intentions, he presented her with a fur coat, confiscated during a mission [i.e., a raid on a village]. Sulia notes that after she took up with Boris, 'Right away I was dressed. Right away, I

Naliboki.[176] Therefore, their participation in the assault on Naliboki would be consistent with Polish eyewitness accounts which mention Jewish residents of Naliboki among the assailants.

Ironically, a few months after the Naliboki massacre, from July 13 to August 8, 1943, as part of a massive anti-partisan sweep known as Operation Hermann, some 60,000 German troops, with the assistance of various auxiliary forces (Lithuanian, Latvian, and Ukrainian) and the Belorussian police, rounded up the population of scores of villages within a 15-kilometre radius of Naliboki forest suspected of supporting the partisans and burned down their homesteads. In total, 60 villages were razed and more than 20,000 villagers were deported to the Reich for slave labour. Hundreds of partisans and around 5,000 villagers were killed as a result of this operation.[177] A number of Catholic priests were executed on suspicion of aiding partisans and Jews: Rev. Józef Bajko and Rev. Józef Baradyn of Naliboki, Rev. Paweł Dołżyk of

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[176] Boris Rubin was one of several Jews from Naliboki who joined Kesler's small group. They occupied themselves solely with robbing farmers in the area. This group was incorporated into Bielski's larger group around December 1942 or perhaps in early 1943, and soon grew to about 50 members. They maintained a separate camp and enjoyed a measure of autonomy. By the fall of 1943, their number grew to about 150 members and Tuvia Bielski did not appear to exercise any real control over them. Kesler's group was notorious for its plundering even among the Bielski group. See Tec, *Defiance,* 76, 112, 123, 128–29, 178–79; Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 183–85, 187, 206; Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 126–27, 133, 139–41; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland*, 201–2 (Itsek Rubezhevskii), 203–5, 214 (Kesler). As described later, a few of members of Kesler's group, including Izaak (Itsek) Rubizhewski, were caught plundering by Polish partisans, but released on Sulia Rubin's intervention after receiving a thrashing. Eventually, the Rubizhewski brothers and Sulia Wolozhinski returned to Bielski's main group. See Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 142–44. Kesler denounced Tuvia Bielski to General Dubov for financial mismanagement (misappropriation of gold, jewelry and money) and asked for permission to form a separate detachment. When Tuvia Bielski found out about this, he arrested Kesler and then executed him. Afterwards he denounced Kesler to the Soviet command as a "marauder" and "bandit." Kesler was reportedly a thief and arsonist, and ran a brothel in Naliboki before the war. After Hitler's attack on Stalin in the summer of 1941, he allegedly denounced Communists, including Jewish party activists, to the Nazis. See Tec, *Defiance,* 179–80, 182–84; Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 235–37, 243–45; Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 158; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 203–5, 214; Testimony of Estera Gorodejska, dated August 9, 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/568, reproduced in part in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 4, 268–70.

[177] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 112; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 130–31; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 44, 405–410; Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 131–33. Other "pacifications" carried out by the Germans on a massive scale in this part of Poland are described in Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 43–45; Maria Wardzyńska, "Radziecki ruch partyzancki i jego zwalczanie w Generalnym Komisariacie Białorusi," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 46–50. Wardzyńska points out that the armed Soviet partisans would flee the area leaving the defenceless local population to fend for itself. The Germans perpetrated heinous crimes against the local population during these operations, such as herding villagers into barns and setting them on fire (for example, in Łapice). The German forces were assisted in these "pacification" actions by indigenous police forces consisting of 19 Schutzmannschaften. Of these, 17 were assigned to the SS and Police Leader for Belorussia in Minsk. Four were Lithuanian, two Latvian, three Belorussian, seven Ukrainian, and one—SS unit "Druzhina"—consisted of 2,000 Russians and Ukrainians. See Frank Buscher, "Investigating Nazi Crimes in Byelorussia: Challenges and Lessons," posted on the Internet at: <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~holo-con/buscher.html>. On Latvian collaborationists see *"Destroy as much as possible…": Latvian Collaborationist Formations on the Territory of Belarus, 1942–1944: Document Compendium* (Helsinki: Johan Beckman Institute, 2010). The role of the local Belorussian order police, which included some Poles in its ranks, was for the most part passive. According to German sources, some 345,000 civilians are reckoned to have died as a result of punitive operations directed against the civilian population of Belorussia, which included prewar Polish territories, together with perhaps 30,000 partisans. See Christian Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde: Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 884 ff. According to Polish sources, non-Jewish losses, both Belorussians and Poles, in the territory of interwar Poland that became "Western Belorussia" were in the range of 150,000–200,000, including some 70–80,000 civilian victims of anti-partisan warfare. See Grzegorz Hryciuk, "Represje niemieckie na Kresach II Rzeczypospolitej 1941–1944, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość,* no. 12 (2008): 94, 96.

Derewno (or Derewna), Rev. Leopold Aulich and Rev. Kazimierz Rybałtowski of Kamień,[178] and Father Achilles (Józef Puchała) and Father Herman (Karol Stępień) of Pierszaje. This operation is vividly recalled by Tuvia Bielski and other Jewish partisans.

> One night I sent Akiva [Shimanovich] and several others to the village of Kletishtza [Kleciszcze], thinking they might be able to get a little food. When they neared the village, they clearly saw several German military units. The village was ablaze with the bright headlights of military cars.
>
> Akiva returned empty-handed, but the news he brought was important. Later, the farmers told us that that night there were thousands of Germans in that village. …
>
> The news came back to us that the Germans had gathered together all the farmers in the neighborhood of the village of Kletishtza, had taken them to safety in cars, and then had set the village afire. The farmers were finally taken to Germany; only a few dozen escaped. The cattle that the Germans couldn't take with them, they shot; any left behind were lost, of course, in the fire. Thus the Germans burned to the ground 17 villages and hundreds of farmhouses and estates.
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> The city of Naliboki was also consumed by fire. The intention of the Germans, as our agents explained to us later, was to destroy the villages that were close to the forest, so that the Partisans could not use them as a source of food or find shelter in them.[179]

However, as Tuvia Bielski recalls, the hardship of the villagers did not end there:

> One of the tall men said he could see a woman in the distance walking around among the trees. The guards caught her, and sent to ask me what, according to the rules and regulations, should be done with her. We investigated to find out what she was doing. "I'm searching for my family, they ran away from Kletishtza [Kleciszcze]," (a border village about six kilometers away) [that had been razed by the Germans].
>
> She was soaking wet. I was sure that she was a spy and knew what she was doing; but then again it could be that she would give us away without knowing she was going it. The farmers knew that Partisans were using the forests for cover and they were forbidden to come near them. Both the Russian Partisans and ourselves were forced for security reasons to kill any suspicious person, and so it was that this woman also had to be shot.[180]

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[178] Mieczysław Suwała, "'Boże, coś Polskę' w Puszczy Nalibockiej," in Julian Humeński, ed., *Udział kapelanów wojskowych w drugiej wojnie światowej* (Warsaw: Akademia Teologii Katolickiej, 1984), 386.

[179] Barkai, *The Fighting Ghettos,* 263–64.

[180] Ibid., 262. For a somewhat different, though improbable, that the woman admitted under interrogation that she had been sent by the Germans, see Tec, *Defiance,* 121, and Moshe Beirach, *Aus dem Ghetto in die Wälder: Bericht eines jüdischen Partisanen 1939–1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2009), 118. (Beirach describes participating in many raids on villages. Ibid., 100–1.) According to Polish sources, a 30-year-old Polish woman from Kleciszcze named Helena Arygo and her 10-year-old daughter were killed by Soviet partisans on July 15, 1943, allegedly as German spies. In fact, she was an informant for the Home Army, which was allied with the Soviet partisans at the time. See Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944,* 249.

Paradoxically, Operation Hermann turned out to be a godsend for the Jewish partisans, who returned to Naliboki forest after the operation and were now free to strip the homes of the depopulated villages of their contents without hindrance:

> … they could seize the food and supplies that the Germans were unable to cart away. And it was quite a bounty.
>
> In the ruined towns the partisans found chickens, pigs, and cows ambling everywhere. They raided beehives for honeycombs and rooted through cellars for potatoes. They discovered vegetables in the gardens ripe for picking and wheat in the fields ready for harvesting. Wagons, sewing machines, cobbler's tools, and threshing machines were theirs for the taking. …
>
> Over the course of several days, everything was taken …[181]

> For many months, the people from the Bielski camp went into those settlements, and to the ruins of Naliboki and Derevna [Derewna], which were close by … to collect anything that could be of use. From Naliboki and Derevna we brought whole parts of buildings, which could be useful to us, and also complete windows, heaters, boilers, barrels and kitchen utensils. … In September 1943 the camp people still went out every day in carts, dug the fields, collected potatoes in sacks, loaded them, and brought them to the camouflages stores, to be kept for the winter months.[182]

The Kesler group, who hid in Naliboki forest during the operation, became ever more aggressive and "would ransack peasant homes for jewelry, watches, and other valuables."[183] The Soviet (Russian) partisans also used this opportunity to strike at Jewish stragglers. As one Bielski partisan recalls, "Because we were split into many small groups some Russian fighters took advantage and attacked us. … They forced my friend to take off his boots and made him give up his shotgun."[184] The Jews experienced no such problems at the hands of Polish partisans.[185] Despite strict orders not to raid the villagers who managed to survive Operation Hermann, five drunken partisans from the Bielski fighters' Ordzhonikidze detachment, led by Kiva (Akiva) Shimanovich, stripped four families of virtually all their food supplies and cow, necessitating

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[181] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 184.

[182] Dr. Shmuel Amarant, "The Partisans of Tuvia Bielski," in Jack Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok: The History of a Shtetl* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 208.

[183] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 184–85. See also Tec, *Defiance,* 124–25. Estera Gorodejska, who was a member of Kesler's group, reported that they had an abundance of food. See the testimony of Estera Gorodejska, dated August 9, 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/568, reproduced in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 4, 268–70.

[184] Tec, *Defiance,* 124.

[185] Ibid., 116.

a reprimand from the Soviet brigade commissar.[186] A few weeks later, a group of 18 partisans including the same Shimanovich robbed a famer in Naliboki, killed his last pig, and beat up his elderly mother.[187]

Even before the Bielski partisans settled in Naliboki forest, the relatively small group of armed men in their ranks had become known for their raids on villagers. One of their members wrote candidly:

> The number of people under Bielski grew to 450. … They faced extraordinary difficulties with food needed to maintain such a large group because the villages could no longer voluntarily supply such large quantities of provisions. Conflicts arose with local Russian partisan units as well as with main leadership of the partisan movement, which stated quite accurately that the local population was becoming hostile toward the partisans because of excessive confiscation of food. Especially since there among us those who abused and even took from villagers who were well disposed [toward the partisans] luxury articles such as chickens, butter, and honey, despite the clear order that such articles could only be confiscated only in distant, hostile villages located near cities and at the services of the Belorussian police.[188]

Once encamped in Naliboki forest, the Bielski partisans did not engage in any true partisan or military activity. The men taken for the Ordzhonikidze fighting unit had been severed off from the main body of the Bielski group, leaving some 120–150 armed men to guard and supply the large family camp. Their problems with the surrounding population, Home Army, and local Belorussian authorities all stemmed from the frequent "missions", that is, food-gathering expeditions they engaged in. As a Jewish woman who joined the Soviet partisans candidly records, it was precisely this that incurred the villagers' wrath.[189] There are many descriptions of those raids. One Bielski partisan recalls:

> We carried out all kinds of missions. …
>
> The unit numbered 1,200 people, all Jews. There was little to eat and there were also few armed men because most of the armed men were placed in Ordzhenikidze's [Ordzhonikidze's] unit. The majority were women, older men. There were in all 120–150 partisans with guns. We were in the Nalibok [Naliboki] forest where there were many units. It was very hard to get food. Besides, we weren't allowed to take anything around our section. We had to go to outlying places, closer to the Germans.

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[186] Report to (Zus) Bielski by Captain Korobkin, commissar of the Frunze Brigade, Documents of the Belorussian Partisan Headquarters in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus in Minsk, fond 3623, opis 1, delo 2, list 64, referring to an incident on December 9, 1943.

[187] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 201.

[188] Testimony of Cwi (Henryk) Issler, August 1961, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/1786, 32. As another Bielski partisan, Alter Michalovsky confirms, "Food was received, or rather taken, from the peasants in the villages from which we operated." See Alufi and Barkeli, *"Aishishuk"; Its History and Its Destruction,* 78 ff.

[189] Testimony of Elżbieta Marchwińska (née Estera Świerzewska), the wife of Józef Marchwiński (Bielski's second in command for a time), in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 260.

> We went into Ogrodnik [Ogrodniki] (a village) one or one and a half km from Korelitz [Korelicze]. We immediately noticed the [Orthodox] priest and the veterinarian. Our men, who were standing outside, didn't think anything was wrong. They took wagons and loaded them up with whatever they could. As we left with 10 wagons full, the [Belorussian] police in the yard began shooting at us. We hardly escaped alive, and we left everything there.
>
> On the way back, we went into villages because we were ashamed to return to our unit empty handed. We brought back a great wealth of provisions. When we got back, we told Bielski what had happened. He admired our heroism and was glad that we managed to get away safely.
>
> Besides partisans, there were also White Poles in the Nalibok forest.
>
> The Germans set up a blockade and I received an order from Bielski to go and see who was in the area. We were always in contact with Christians who would give us news. I went out with Chaim Kravetz and Barke Rubizhevski. We rode slowly and came to a Christian. Before entering a village, we would stop at the first house and find out whether there were any Germans in the village. The Christian told us that everything was quiet in the village and that there were no Germans. We went in further and we were suddenly caught in a storm of bullets. This killed the White Poles.[190]

Occasionally, the Jews in the Ordzhonikidze partisan detachment, under the command of a Soviet commander, and, informally, Zus Bielski, were called on for various tasks of a military nature and were involved in a few confrontations with the Home Army. The only "face to face" confrontations with the Germans that Tuvia Bielski describes in his memoirs (published in 1946) occurred in the early stages of their formation, in September and October 1942, near Nowogródek, and those were undertaken together with a Soviet partisan detachment led by Lieutenant Viktor Panchenkov. The first incident was an ambush on a truck carrying provisions requisitioned in the village of Radziuki; the second, a failed attempt to destroy a small rural train station in Jacuki probably staffed by two railroad police.[191]

In the Radziuki incident, twenty-five men from the Bielski group armed with rifles and an equal number from the Soviet group fired at the supply truck and brought it to a halt. Some of the eight Germans and Belorussian policemen who alighted from the truck were hit by bullets as they fled. The partisans confiscated some weapons including two machine guns and four rifles, ammunition, and food provisions. They then fired bullets into the gas tank of the vehicle and it exploded.[192] According to Bielski's 1943

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[190] Ben-Ir, "On the Brink of Destruction," in Michael Walzer-Fass, ed., *Korelits: Hayeha ve-hurbana shel kehila yeduhit* (Tel Aviv: Korelicze Societies in Israel and the U.S.A., 1973), 212ff; translated as *Korelitz: The Life and Destruction of a Jewish Community.* Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/korelicze/kor206.html#Page212>. Ben-Ir also describes how he was part of a group that was tasked by Bielski to wipe out the entire Stankevitch family of "Izveh" (Izwa) because the head of the family informed the Germans on Jews and partisans: "Each person in our group was assigned a task in advance so that we each knew what we had to do. Yisrael Salanter was to kill her husband. Michl Lubavtich was to kill his wife. I one daughter and Zalman Lubavitch, the other daughter."

[191] Tec, *Defiance,* 84–85.

[192] "History of the Formation of the M.I. Kalinin Partisan Detachment," "Jewish Units in the Soviet Partisan Movement: Selected Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 23 (1993): 402.

report on the Ordzhonikidze detachment, allegedly "many Germans were killed" in this incident.[193] Over time, the Jacuki incident grew into a bloody battle. According to Tuvia Bielski's report of September 16, 1944, four Germans were killed and seven wounded.[194] In his postwar memoirs, he claims that seven to eight Germans were killed.[195] According to one candid participant, however, there were no casualties, either German or Soviet. Pinchas Boldo, a partisan from the Bielski group, stated: "The enemy had realized that they were being attacked and they opened fire on us … not one German was killed … None of us died. But we did not succeed."[196] In the Nowogródek memorial book these two episodes take on even bigger proportions:

> In November 1942 the Bielski's [sic] with Victor Panchenka's [sic] Russian partisans, ambushed German military convoys on the Novoyelna-Novogrudok [Nowojelnia-Nowogródek] road. Asael [Bielski] was the commander of the Jewish unit. Scores of Germans were killed, and many weapons were captured on that occasion. The weapons were used to equip the fighters from the Novogrudok Ghetto.
>
> There was a second battle in November under Asael's command, at the railway station Naziki [Jacuki], on the Neman [Niemen]-Lida line. It was a fierce battle with the Germans, who were dug-in in a bunker that guarded the station. It ended successfully.[197]

Another assault described by Bielski, also a joint operation with Panchenkov's detachment in March 1943, was an ambush directed against a Lithuanian police battalion in the village of Draczyłowo east of Nowogódek. Allegedly, 15 policemen were killed or wounded.[198] On January 28, 1944, Bielski's combatants took part in an ambush by the Kirov Brigade on German soldiers and local policemen near the village of Pudzin. The villagers were subjected to an abusive raid by a group of Jewish marauders; unaware that the raid was being staged as a trap, they turned to the German authorities, who had a garrison in

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[193] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 198.

[194] "History of the Formation of the M.I. Kalinin Partisan Detachment," "Jewish Units in the Soviet Partisan Movement: Selected Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 23 (1993): 402; also reproduced in Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 232, 240–41.

[195] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 355–57; Barkai, *The Fighting Ghettos,* 245–46; Tec, *Defiance,* 226 n.17.

[196] Ibid., 85.

[197] Y. [Yehoshua] Yaffe, "Such Were the Jewish Partisans," in Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 246.

[198] "History of the Formation of the M.I. Kalinin Partisan Detachment," "Jewish Units in the Soviet Partisan Movement: Selected Documents," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 23 (1993): 404; also reproduced in Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 234, 241–42.

Brzozówka, for help.[199] The assaults on Filonowce and Biskupce, in March and April 1944, for which the Soviet partisans conscripted Bielski's combatants, are described later on. Two additional assaults in which Bielski's combatants participated was an attack on Kamień in May 1944, in which the settlement was burned to the ground and 23 Home Army soldiers and more than 20 civilians were killed, and an attack on the Belorussian villages of Kupisk Lubczański, Kupisk Pierwszy and Kupisk Kazionny, on June 13, 1944, where hundreds of farmsteads were set on fire and an unknown number of civilians were killed in retaliation for the activities of the small self-defence group that tried to protect the villagers from unwanted raids.[200]

Once they settled in Naliboki forest, where a permanent camp was set up in the fall of 1943, the Bielski group did not engage in armed confrontations with the Germans. The following candid account describes the one and only planned battle which fell through.

> The plan was to fight a nearby German unit. We learned from the Russians that the Germans were in retreat and were trying to kill as many of us as they could in a final burst of rage as they were driven away.
>
> However, even with Russian and Jewish partisans together, we were no match for the well-trained German army, and we had to go deeper in the forest. We crossed treacherous swamps, laying down logs and branches as we went along … Once past the swamp, we fled through more thick forest.
>
> The Russian and German armies crossed paths that day, and shot at us as we ran through their crossfire. We had to duck to avoid the bullets. We yelled in Russian, "We're partisans, don't shot!" The Russian soldiers would stop, but the German soldiers continued to attack.
>
> I was not hit, but other members of our group were not so lucky. One small boy from my town and none men from the Bielski partisans were killed that day, and one woman, the mother of a friend of mine, was followed into a bunker, cornered, and shot.[201]

The scenes of Tuvia Bielski and his partisans attacking German tanks found in the film *Defiance* are nothing but sheer Hollywood inventions and myth-building fantasy.

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[199] This ambush, which allegedly claimed the lives of 8 German officers and 26 policemen, is variously described and its true extent cannot be confirmed. Soviet and Jewish sources refer to the location of the German garrison as Huta or Huta Niemen. Although the village of Pudzin was described earlier by Chaim Basist as a "friendly" village, the subsequent hunt for alleged collaborators in the vicinity was said to have taken 15 lives. The myth-building Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation attributes the entire operation to the "Bielski Brigade" and makes no mention of Soviet partisans. See Leonid Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944: The Case of Belorussia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 207–34, at p. 225; Chaim Basist, *The Story of the House of Plotnik-Monco-Basist,* December 2008, Internet: <http://museumoffamilyhistory.com/wims-basist-03.htm>; Charles Bedzow, Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation, Internet: <http://www.jewishpartisans.org/partisans/charles-bedzow>; Charles Bedzow, Holocaust Encyclopedia, Internet: <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/charles-bedzow>.

[200] Kazimierz Krajewski, "'Opór'? 'Odwet'? Czy po prostu 'polityka historyczna'?," *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 3 (March 2009): 99–108, at pp. 105–6; Dariusz Jarosiński and Krzysztof Hejke, "Bielscy i inni," *Niezależna Gazeta Polska,* February 6, 2009, 54–57.

[201] Essie Shor and Andrea Zakin, *Essie: The True Story of a Teenage Fighter in the Bielski Partisans* (Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania: Mindfulness Publishing, 2009), 64–65.

For the most part, as already mentioned, the Bielski group simply robbed in the countryside. Dov Zalmanovicz, one of a group of twenty-four escapees from the Nowogródek ghetto who joined the Bielski group, recalled:

> When we got out of the forest and found ourselves in the open, we ran into two people on horses, wearing civilian clothes. They asked us if we had escaped from the ghetto. Even though we didn't know who they were, we told them that we had. They took us on their horses to the nearest village. They told the peasants that they would come back for us in two weeks, and they instructed them not to harm us. Exactly two weeks later, they appeared in a wagon, and only then did they reveal to us that they were partisans. They told us that there was a special unit of Jewish partisans, among them people from our town, and they suggested that we join them. Naturally, we chose to be in that unit, where there were Jews and people we knew. We went into the forest with them. When we got there we couldn't believe what we saw. There was a real town in the middle of the forest. Little huts had been built one next to the other. We were taken into an office and interrogated at length, because we were the first two of the twenty-four survivors who had managed to escape the ghetto through the tunnel and reach the partisans.
>
> The first question was whether we had any money in our possession in order to buy weapons, because the custom was that each person bought his own weapon, with his own money. We had no money, of course, but after a few months, the situation changed altogether.
>
> Planes appeared in the sky and dropped weapons in large quantities, to a point where an ordinary revolver no longer had any value because we were using automatic weapons. The two of us also received a weapon. I remained all the time with the friend who had escaped with me from the ghetto. We did not take part in real combat per se, but we went to the neighboring villages to get food. Sometimes, we ran into bandits and robbers, and we simply killed them.[202]

The irony of using words such as "bandits" and "robbers" apparently escapes this witness whose main activity was robbing the surrounding villages. According to a report filed by a cleric from Wilno in June 1943, bandit attacks on Polish peasants by Jews hiding in the forests and murders of entire Polish families by Soviet and Jewish partisans were becoming alarmingly frequent.[203] This report is amply borne out by many accounts that are found later in this work. Soviet archival sources also confirm that banditry among Soviet partisans was widespread:

> a Soviet informer accused Bielski himself of embezzling gold; no serious consequences followed, however. Charges of robbery were also levied at Jewish partisans by their Soviet comrades. According to the report of 28 May 1943, "some groups, among them the Jewish ones, preoccupy themselves not with struggle but with capturing supplies. Some persons in them, who had fled from a camp, carry out banditry (plundering, drunkenness, and rape)."

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[202] Denise Nevo and Mira Berger, *We Remember: Testimonies of Twenty-four Members of Kibbutz Megiddo who Survived the Holocaust* (New York: Shengold, 1994), 235–36.

[203] Tadeusz Krahel, "Archidiecezja wileńska," in Zieliński, *Życie religijne w Polsce pod okupacją 1939–1945,* 36. According to this report, the Jews had become a tool in the hands of the Soviets to further their anti-Polish activities.

> The complaints about these alleged transgressions sound disingenuous, coming as they do from the Soviet sources. The Soviet-allied guerrillas routinely engaged in plundering peasants. Documents show that partisan activity often amounted to banditry, rape, pillage, and murder. Occasionally individual transgressors were punished. On the whole, however, the leadership of the Soviet irregular forces considered robbery to be a legitimate *modus operandi*. Since they largely lacked popular support, the Soviet guerrillas raided villages and manors for supplies. As a top Soviet commander put it, "Most partisan units feed, clothe, and arm themselves at the expense of the local population and not by capturing booty in the struggle against fascism. That arouses in the people a feeling of hostility, and they say, 'The Germans take everything away and one must also give something to the partisans.'"[204]

As we shall see, raids on the civilian population took precedence over military activities.

[204] Marek J. Chodakiewicz's review in *Sarmatian Review,* no. 2 (April) 2006: 1217–20 of Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 48, 52–53, 88, 111–12, 123, 144, 158, 166, 193, 203.

5. Acting on Orders to Eliminate the Polish Partisans

Even after the massacre in Naliboki, at the behest of the Home Army supreme command, the Polish underground in the Nowogródek and Wilno regions continued to maintain good relations and cooperate with the Soviet partisans, despite disturbing occurrences not far away. In the province of Polesie (Polesia), to the south of Nowogródek, Soviet partisans made contact with Polish partisans. Accepting an invitation to discuss cooperation, nine Polish partisans ("Sikorshchiki", i.e., Poles loyal to the Polish government in exile headed by General Sikorski) were treacherously killed near Łuniniec on May 9, 1943.[205] General Ponomarenko was immediately advised of the "success" of this operation and passed the news on to Stalin. On June 14, 1943, he met with Stalin in the Kremlin; Molotov and Beria were also in attendance.

As mentioned earlier, pursuant to instructions from the top echelons, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia had charted a course for the future of Polish-Soviet relations. On June 22, 1943, General Ponomarenko issued the following instructions in a circular to the district Communist party committees in the field:

> In those regions that are under the influence of our partisan units and party centres do not allow activities of Polish groups formed by the reactionary nationalist circles [i.e., the Home Army]. The leaders are to be eliminated in a manner that is not noticeable. The [Polish] units are to be disbanded and their arms depots are to be appropriated or, if it is possible, take those units under your secure influence. Use them by directing them to active combat against the Germans. Regroup and break them up in an appropriate way. You should do away with their significance [as] independent military units and attach them to large [Soviet] units, after which you are to carry out quietly an appropriate cleansing of hostile elements.[206]

Because of Operation "Hermann," the strike on Miłaszewski's detachment in the Naliboki forest had to be put on hold. Instead, the Soviet partisans turned their attention to a Polish partisan detachment based near Lake Narocz, to the north of Naliboki forest. On August 16, 1943, the local Soviet commander, Fedor

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[205] Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsialno-politicheskoi istorii, Moscow, fond 69, opis 1, delo 29, listy 125–52, report dated November 24, 1943. See also the following report found in fond 69, opis 1, delo 20, list 68, Ponomarenko to Stalin, dated May 21, 1943: "On May 9, 1943 in the Lenin [Łunin] raion of the Pińsk oblast [Soviet] partisans captured a group of Polish nationalists consisting of six persons led by a landowner [name undecipherable] from Nowy Dwór, a former Polish reserve officer. From the captured Polish nationalists they seized weapons, toxic substances, lists of [members of] a local partisan unit, and a Polish frontier guard badge awarded for terrorist acts [sic] against Soviet workers."

[206] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 41–42; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 243.

Markov, turned to General Ponomarenko for permission to "disarm" the "Kmicic" detachment, which was granted on August 21, 1943.[207] The task was accomplished five days later.

The unprovoked murder of Home Army Second Lieutenant Antoni Burzyński (*nom de guerre* "Kmicic") and some eighty members of his unit, the so-called Polish Legion, is illustrative of the pattern of deceit and treachery that characterized relations with the Soviet partisans, and indeed with the Soviet Union, throughout the war and afterwards.[208] In June 1943, Fedor Markov, the commander of the Voroshilov Brigade, had reached an understanding with Burzyński's fledgling detachment of 300 men, and, on the surface, relations appeared to be cordial. One of the terms agreed to was that Jews would refrain from carrying out robberies during provision-gathering expeditions, which often entailed brutal mistreatment of

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[207] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody*, 292–93; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944*, 421. In his dispatch of August 16, 1943, Markov reported that the "goal" of the Polish partisan leaders was to arm themselves and await the opportune time to strike at the Soviet partisans. General Ponomarenko approved the disarming of the Polish unit, which was to be done "skilfully and tactfully." A subsequent report dated November 22 or 23, 1943, submitted to Stalin by General Ponomarenko, expanded on that earlier pretext and concocted a more concrete and convenient alibi, namely, that Markov undertook the disarming of the Polish partisan unit as a "countermeasure" only upon learning through his spies that the Polish unit was preparing to destroy the leadership of the Soviet brigade and disarm the brigade. See A. Kasparavičius, Č. Laurinavičius, and N. Lebedeva, eds., *SSSR i Litva v gody vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Sbornik dokumentov,* vol. 2 (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos institutas, 2012), 705. The claim that the Poles were planning a hostile operation against the Soviet partisans is something that would have been in violation of the instructions of the Home Army headquarters not to enter into a conflict with the Soviet partisans, whereas Markov's attack on the Polish unit was entirely consistent with earlier instructions of the Soviet partisan command to eliminate the Polish partisans. In the opinion of historian Kazimierz Krajewski, the Soviet partisan command decided to disarm the "Kmicic" detachment once it learned that it was subordinated to the Home Army, a fact that Kmicic did not openly publicize. See Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach,* 383–84.

[208] Among the many publications that deal with this topic see, especially, Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, no. 39 (1996): 134–50; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 128–32; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich*, 56–60; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944*, 420–422; Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach,* 383–85. All of these sources refer to the relevant Soviet archival documents.

the villagers.[209] Indeed, such charges were mentioned frequently in reports from that period[210] and, as we shall see, are corroborated by Jewish sources. The Poles and their underground were ardent opponents of the German occupiers. Early in August 1943, Polish partisans staged daring assaults on German garrisons in Duniłowicze and Żodziszki.[211] These military operations eclipsed anything the Soviet partisans had undertaken in the area.

While ostensibly cooperting with the Polish underground against the Germans, as he made clear in a report to General Ponomarenko, Markov was intent on subordinating the Polish partisans and had dispatched agents to infiltrate and secretly undermine their detachment.[212] As a counterforce, Markov established a Polish-Soviet detachment under the command of Wincenty Mroczkowski, named after Bartosz Głowacki. The decisive blow came on August 26, 1943, when Burzyński together with other Polish officers were invited to the Soviet camp on the pretext of finalizing a joint assault on a German outpost in Miadzioł. Not suspecting foul play, the Poles fell into a carefully laid trap. The Polish delegation was

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[209] Aleksy Litwin, "Obraz polskiego ruchu oporu widziany oczyma partyzanckiego zwiadu i podziemia Białorusi," in Wiesław Balcerak, ed., *Polska-Białoruś 1918–1945* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, Stowarzyszenie Współpracy Polska–Wschód, Stowarzyszenie Polska–Białoruś, 1994), 166. In his discussions with the Soviet partisans in June 1943, Lieutenant-Colonel Janusz Szlaski ("Prawdzic"), whose real name was Jan Szulc, also raised the issue of repressions, including robberies and rapes, committed by Jewish partisans during raids on Polish villages. See "Protokół spisany dn. 8 czerwca 43 r. przez Delegata Sztabu Głównego partyzantów polskich-Wschód oraz Komendy Lenińskiej partyzanckiej brygady sowieckiej," (attachment to no. Cy 345), in the Archives of the Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny in Warsaw, sygnatura III/32/10, k. 1–3. Similar complaints about Jewish marauders were made in meetings with Soviet delegations in other regions. See, for example, Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 163; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 116–18.

[210] Marauding by Soviet partisans was one of the primary matters raised in discussions with Captain Viktor Manokhin, commander of the Gastello Brigade, in November 1943. The Polish record of this meeting cites cases of use of force (armed robbery, murders, rapes) and theft of valuables (gold, watches), clothing (blouses, children's clothes), and other items that Soviet partisans simply did not need for survival. The Soviet representatives did not deny these occurrences, and in fact Manokhin's own report confirms them. See Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 155, 157–58; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 92. A Soviet summary report of a meeting with Home Army representatives in Syrowatki, on December 14, 1943, also recognized the problem of drunkenness and robberies that plagued the Soviet partisans. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 109. Soviet sources make it clear, however, that the complaints were not taken seriously and these meetings were often treated by the Soviet side as little more than intelligence gathering missions. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 119. The Soviets were reluctant to reach any real compromise in an atmosphere in which bounties were being put on the heads of Polish partisan leaders. See Borodziewicz, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK,* 112. Jewish sources, however, continue to tow the Soviet propaganda line on this issue and lay the blame for the failed negotiations on the Polish side. See Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 194–95.

[211] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 126–27; Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach,* 382–83.

[212] A. Chackiewicz, "O rozbrojeniu formacji AK w Nalibockiej i Naroczańskiej puszczach w latach 1943–1944," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 73; Andrzej Chmielarz, "'Sojusznik naszych sojuszników': Stosunek ZSRR do Armii Krajowej," in ibid., 187; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 130; Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944,* 421. The Soviets recruited local residents to infiltrate Polish partisan units. One such person was Nina Pankova Zelkhefer, a Jewish woman from Vitebsk, who was recruited in September 1943. She resided in Wilno since 1921, where she had established contacts with the Poles. See Lietuvos ypatingasis archyvas, Lietuvos TSR Valstybės saugumo komitetas (KGB), SSSR NKVD 4 valdybos lietuvių operatyvinė grupė, F. nr. K-1 mikrofilmo nr. 605, Ap. nr. 3, Saug. nr. 7, Korrespondentsiia s No 277 Berom, Partizanskii spetsotriad "Druzia" v tylu u nemtsev na territorii Belorussii i Litvy, C. 34, 19.9.1943 g.

arrested and, according to some reports, Burzyński was tortured before being put to death.[213] A large contingent of Soviet partisans from the Voroshilov and Rokossovsky Brigades was then dispatched to surround the Polish partisans' camps near Lake Narocz in Narocz forest (Puszcza Naroczańska). Some 200 Polish partisans were disarmed and captured. Around 100 Polish partisans who outside the camp at the time escaped this treacherous fate. (Afterwards, they joined the detachment of Lieutenant Zygmunt Szendzialarz ("Łupaszko").) The rest of the story can be found in a report authored by Markov himself and sent to General Ponomarenko, who had given the green light for this operation:

> Tovarishch "Ber" [NKVD Major Jonas Vildžiūnas], the leader of the operational group which conducted the investigation, segregated the disarmed and arrested Polish brigade into three groups. The first group, consisting of 50 men, together with the brigade leaders [among them Antoni Burzyński ("Kmicic")], was shot. The second group, consisting of 80 men, was disarmed and released. The third group, consisting of 70 men, was sent to a [Soviet-formed] partisan group headed by [Wincenty] Mroczkowski. … Sending these 70 people to Mroczkowski's unit was a mistake. They should have been shot, but we were worried that it might be used against us by the Germans and Poles as propaganda about a second Katyn. …
>
> During my absence Mroczkowski learned of the execution [of "Kmicic's" men] and, for that reason, went over to the Polish nationalists taking 60 Poles with him. … The 30 remaining Poles got arms from us and planned to go over to the Polish side. We had these 30 shot. In total, we shot 80 men from the Polish legion.
>
> Groups from the Polish legion are now openly attacking Soviet partisans, especially my brigade. …
>
> We are using every means to liquidate the armed Polish bandit groups in the field.
>
> 1. We are sending agents to every Polish group in order to undermine them.
> 2. We are sending large numbers of agents (80 people) to every area where there are Polish partisans in order to learn of their movements, bases and activities and to inform headquarters.
> 3. We are currently distributing pamphlets informing about the situation on the front and the bandit activities of the Poles.
> 4. We issued an order to all our partisans to disarm any Poles who are encountered and to liquidate their leaders and members of the Polish Military Organization [i.e., Home Army].

[213] According to an account attributed to a Jew who served in the Markov Brigade, Burzyński was suspended from a tree with his arms tied behind his back; his heels were burned with fire and pieces of skin were ripped from his flesh. See Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej,* 79; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 129. Banasikowski deals with the destruction of "Kmicic's" unit on pages 75–83, Wołkonowski on pages, 126–32. It is worth noting that Markov, as well as several Soviet prisoners of war, had been rescued from the Germans by Helena Borowicz, a Polish woman who worked in a Wilno hospital.

5. We will clear the area of this vile garbage.[214]

After the assault on Burzyński's unit, Markov dispatched his men to destroy its active remnants,[215] murdering at least twenty members of the Polish underground network in the vicinity.[216] Reorganized under the command of Lieutenant Zygmunt Szendzielarz ("Łupaszko"), the Polish partisans struck back at the Voroshilov Brigade. On September 11, they attacked Soviet partisans near Niedroszla. The following day they attacked a Soviet unit plundering the village of Chojeckowszczyzna.[217] The Soviet assault on the Poles surpassed in scope any anti-German activity carried out by the Soviet partisans and took on a distinctly

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[214] Markov's full report, dated October 15, 1943, is reproduced in Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 141–46; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 56–59; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 127–30. Another report, authored by General Dubov (Grigorii Sidorok), who headed the Soviet regional partisan centre in Iwieniec, is found in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 95–96. See also Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 23–25; A. Chackiewicz, "O rozbrojeniu formacji AK w Nalibockiej i Naroczańskiej puszczach w latach 1943–1944," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 73–74; Chmielarz, "'Sojusznik naszych sojuszników': Stosunek ZSRR do Armii Krajowej," in ibid., 186–87; Wiaczesław Nosewicz, "Przegląd dokumentów Narodowego Archiwum Republiki Białoruś o działalności formacji Armii Krajowej w okresie II wojny światowej," in ibid., 224–26. For an early account see Łopalewski, *Między Niemnem a Dźwiną,* 244. According to one of the Poles apprehended in this raid, the eighty partisans who were reportedly "disarmed and released" had in fact escaped. Apparently, Markov did not wish to acknowledge this shortcoming in his report. See the statement of Janina Smoleńska, in in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 127–28. Markov's strike at the Polish partisans was criticized by Captain Viktor Manokhin, commander of the Gastello Brigade, as "premature, ill-conceived, and sanctioned … on the basis of false information." Moreover, as Manokhin noted, it had allowed the Polish partisans near Wilno to escape a similar fate and turned the Belorussian Catholic population against the Soviet partisans. See Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 147; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 130. The charge that the Poles executed local Soviet activists in Duniłowicze and were compiling further lists of activists to be eliminated, which allegedly served as the pretext for the liquidation of Burzyński's unit, has never been substantiated. See Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 147; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 139; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 131; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 292.

[215] Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 25.

[216] Wardzyńska, "Mord popełniony latem 1943 r. przez partyzantów sowieckich na żołnierzach AK z oddziału 'Kmicica,'" *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 139.

[217] Bohdan Urbankowski, "Antysowieckie powstania: Polska," in *Encyklopedia "Białych Plam"* (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2000), vol. 1, 226–27.

ethnic dimension.[218] Rachel Margolis, a member of the Jewish underground in Wilno who arrived in the Narocz forest in September 1943, recalled that one of the senior officers in Markov's brigade even went so

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[218] Historian Alexander Prusin, however, advances a markedly differently assessment of the outcome of the assault on Burzyński's unit—one that has not been substantiated. Allegedly, it was the Polish underground who terrorized the countryside: "The AK retaliated by carrying out 'pacifications' of the Byelorussian villages in Navahrudak [Nowogródek] district, burning houses and killing residents suspected of collaboration with the Soviets. The AK units also executed Soviet captives, including prisoners of war who had escaped from German camps." See Prusin, *The Lands Between,* 189. In support of this claim, Prusin cites a general article by K.I. Kozak, "Germanskie okkupatsionnye voennye i grazhdanskie organy v Belarusi 1941–1944 gg.: Analiz i itogi poter," in V.F. Balakirau and K.I. Kozak, eds., *Pershaia i druhaia sysvetnyia voiny: Akupatsyia i iae nastupstvy na Belarusi* (Minsk: Histarychnaia maisternia, 2006). However, as other studies have shown, Germans and Soviet partisans were primarily responsible for reprisal massacres and killings which took tens of thousands of civilian lives. See, for example, Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Partisan War in Belorussia, 1941–1944," in Roger Chickering, Stig Förster, and Bernd Greiner, eds., *A World at Total War: Global Conflict and the Politics of Destruction, 1937–1945* (Washington, D.C.: German Historical Institute; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 261–76: "From the spring of 1942 until the spring of 1943, Germans resorted to larger-scale operations, encircling territories held by partisans and murdering the civilian population in them. … after the spring of 1943, when the Germans began to create 'dead zones' from which all inhabitants were evacuated—either to forced labor in Germany or—those unable to work—to special settlements in other districts, where many of them starved to death." The Soviet partisans retaliated by killing thousands of Belorussian policemen, members of the civil administration (petty officials such village elders and mayors of small towns, schoolteachers, professionals) and other civilian collaborators, real or imagined, often along with their families. Prisoners were not taken as a rule by either side. Punishing entire families was an accepted practice of both the Germans and Soviet partisans. Nolte sums up as follows: "Partisan war in the Soviet Union was total on both sides. Both employed unrestricted violence against civilians, but the Germans were more indiscriminate in their practices. They used violence systematically against entire regions. They enslaved captured partisans. And they undertook the wholesale murder of villagers. The partisans' violence against noncombatants was directed against the family members of collaborators, while the Germans attacked entire villages." However, in some cases the Soviet partisans did destroy entire villages suspected of collaboration with the Germans. The actions of the Polish underground against collaborators do not come close to this type of unrestricted, indiscriminate bloodshed meted out by the Germans and the Soviet partisans. As Timothy Snyder points out, German pacification operations were actually designed to kill civilians. Edward Westermann describes the fate of three villages in southwestern Polesia (Polesie):

> … on 22 and 23 September 1942, Order Police Battalion 310 was dispatched to destroy three villages for ostensible connections to the partisans, At the first village, Borki, the police apprehended the entire population, marched the men, women, and children seven hundred meters, and then handed out shovels so that people could dig their own graves. The policemen shot the Belarusian peasants without a break from 9:00 in the morning until 6:00 in the evening, killing 203 men, 372 women, and 130 children. The Order Police spared 104 people classified as "reliable," … The battalion reached the next village, Zabloitse [Zabłocie], at 2:00 in the morning, and surrounded it at 5:30. They forced all of the inhabitants into the local school, and then shot 284 men, women, and children. At the third village, Borysovka [Borysówka], the battalion reported killing 169 men, women, and children.

See Edward B. Westermann, "'Ordinary Men' or 'Ideological Soldiers'? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942," *German Studies Review,* vol. 21, no. 1 (February 1998): 41–68, at 53–55, as cited in Snyder, *Bloodlands*, 240–41. In October 1942, Hermann Göring issued an extraordinary directive not to shoot Belorussian men in villages suspected of supporting the partisans but rather to send them to Germany as forced labourers; however, this did not preclude bloody reprisals from continuing. In May 1943, in Operation Cottbus, the Germans sought to clear all partisans from an area about 140 kilometres north of Minsk. Their forces destroyed village after village by herding populations into barns and then burning the barns to the ground. The official count was 6,087 dead, but the Dirlewager Brigade alone reported 14,000 killed in this operation. About 6,000 men were sent to Germany as labourers. See Snyder, *Bloodlands,* 244–46. In 1942 and 1943, Wilhelm Kube, the head of the General Commissariat of Belorussia, offered concessions to Belorussians such as schools, advisory councils, and militias, and even reversed the collectivization of agriculture, decreeing that peasants could own their own land. However, these attempts to reverse some of the basic principles of German colonialism in the hope of rallying the population to resist the Red Army were largely unsuccessful, since the Germans continued their economic exploitation of the countryside and showed little respect for the lives of the peasants. See Snyder, *Bloodlands,* 248–49. Timothy Snyder sums up the impact of the German "anti-partisan" warfare and Soviet "retribution" on the civilian population as follows (at pp. 250–51):

far as to harass Jewish partisans for speaking in Polish among themselves.[219]

> The AK retaliated by carrying out 'pacifications' of the Byelorussian villages in Navahrudak [Nowogródek] district, burning houses and killing residents suspected of collaboration with the Soviets. The AK units also executed Soviet captives, including prisoners of war who had escaped from German camps.

The massacre near Lake Narocz was not the first such incident, nor was it the last. Individual Poles connected to the underground had already been killed in 1942,[220] and by mid-1943 the Soviets were quietly eliminating small groups of Polish partisans and those suspected of cooperating with the Polish underground. A delegation of Polish partisans was murdered near Szczuczyn in May 1943, after accepting an invitition to attend a meeting with the Soviets.[221] Tadeusz Korsak of the Wilejka-Mołodeczno circuit command of the Wilno District of the Home Army was abducted by the Chkalov Brigade in September 1943. He was murdered after an interrogation lasting several weeks for refusing to become an informer.[222] (Tadeusz Korsak's rescue efforts on behalf of Jews are described later.) Many other Poles with Home Army connections were also executed.[223] Yet despite all these betrayals, not fathoming the depths of Soviet perfidy, the Polish partisan leadership still attempted to come to an understanding with the Soviet partisans.[224] However, ceasefires were broken repeatedly by the Soviet side.

On the surface, relations between the Polish and Soviet partisans in the area of Naliboki forest also appeared to be proper and promising. Although they had agreed to a joint escape strategy during Operation Hermann, which was unleashed by the Germans in Naliboki forest in July and August 1943, this did not prevent the Soviets from skirting any military engagement with the Germans and leaving the Poles in the

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[219] Margolis, *A Partisan from Vilna,* 429.

[220] See, for example, the murders perpetrated in the Szczuczyn area described in Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 202–203.

[221] Kazimierz Krajewski, "Nowogródzki Okręg Armii Krajowej," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 57.

[222] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 144.

[223] Ibid., 149, 153, and the partial list of victims at pp. 275–81. See also Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 144–45. Poles were also killed by Soviet partisans during robberies and drunken orgies. Ibid., 143 (Borki); Boradyn, *Niemen—rzeka niezgody,* 99 (Borowikowszczyzna).

[224] For example, "Łupaszko's" Home Army unit entered into negotiations with Soviet delegations in November and December 1943. See Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowgródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 26.

lurch to fend for themselves. The Poles suffered more than a hundred casualties.[225] The leaders of Stołpce Battalion (*Batalion Stołpecki,* later *Zgrupowanie Stołpeckie* or Stołpce Concentration) of the Home Army, then under the command of Major Wacław Pełka ("Wacław"),[226] had no qualms about accepting an invitation to meet with General Dubov (Grigorii Sidorok) at the Soviet base on December 1, 1943, not suspecting what lay in store for them.

The Soviet course of action had been approved at the highest level and was carefully and stealthily executed. Permission to carry out this operation, that is, disarming the Polish partisans and arresting their leaders, had been sought, on November 4, 1943, by General Platon (Vasilii Chernyshev), who headed the Soviet partisan supreme command in "Western Belorussia", and was granted on November 14, 1943, by General Ponomarenko, the chief of general staff of the partisan movement.[227] General Platon had claimed falsely that the Poles did not want to fight the Germans,[228] and that Polish partisans were terrorizing the local population and attacking small groups of Soviet partisans. The fighting order for the disarming

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[225] Prawdzic-Szlaski, *Nowogródczyzna w walce 1940–1945,* 99, 204; Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 112; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 130–31.

[226] At the beginning of November 1943 Major Pełka was sent by the High Command of the Home Army in Warsaw to take control of the Stołpce Battalion, which was previously under the command of Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra") from September 9, 1943, when the latter had replaced Kacper Miłaszewski ("Lewald"). Pilch was one of several paratroopers dispatched from England (known as *cichociemni*, "the silent and unseen ones") to reinforce the field. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 109–10, 118, 412, 414, 419.

[227] See Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 120–24; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 152–54, 295–96 (document 22), 296 (document 24). Additional sources dealing with these events include: Polskie Siły Zbrojne, Armia Krajowa, *Drogi cichociemnych,* 142–47 (and the English translation of this book Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 152–58); Juchniewicz, *Polacy w radzieckim ruchu partyzanckim,* 305–306; Jerzy Brzozowski, Stanisław Krasucki and Jan Malinowski, *"Burza" na Kresach Wschodnich* (Bydgoszcz: Biblioteka Wileńskich Rozmaitości, 1994), 18–20; A. Chackiewicz, "O rozbrojeniu formacji AK w Nalibockiej i Naroczańskiej puszczach w latach 1943–1944," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 83–85; Chmielarz, "'Sojusznik naszych sojuszników': Stosunek ZSRR do Armii Krajowej," in ibid., 187; Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej,* 90–101; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 529–32; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 152–73. Bolesław and Hanna Jabłoński's account is reproduced, in part, in Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Komentarze," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 166–67. For an early treatment see Łopalewski, *Między Niemnem a Dźwiną,* 244–45. Polish retaliations are described in Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 532–33. Even after these events, however, Soviet partisans captured and disarmed by the Home Army were routinely released unharmed. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 168, 170.

[228] In fact, in the fall of 1943, the Stołpce battalion attacked the German and Belorussian outposts in Rubieżewicze, Derewno (Derewna), Chotów, Jeremicze, and Zasuł. See Broadyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 153 n.231.

operation, issued on November 30, 1943 by Pavel Gulevich, the commander of the Stalin Brigade, included instructions to shoot on the spot any Poles who resisted.[229]

Let us digress here before returning to the December 1, 1943 disarming operation. On November 22, 1943, General Ponomarenko sent a report to Stalin proposing a change of strategy from isolated altercations to a full-scale assault on the Polish underground in order to "destroy" hostile Polish partisans active in "Western Belorussia," to "discredit, disarm and scatter" those who allegedly adopted a wait-and-see attitude (toward the Germans), and to "liquidate" their leadership.[230] Around the same time, the Home Army High Command took a position diametrically opposed to that of the Soviets'. On November 20, 1943 General Tadeusz Komorowski ("Bór"), the commander in chief of the Home Army, issued his Order 1300/III, which contained a basic outline of Operation Tempest ("Burza"). He instructed the field to cooperate with the Soviet forces, to welcome them as "allies of allies" and to stress their partnership in the common fight against Nazi Germany. Much latitude was left to the judgment of local commanders.

> I have ordered the commanders and units which are to participate in fighting the retreating Germans to reveal themselves to in-coming Russians. Their task at this stage will be to assert the existence of the Polish Republic. …
>
> All our war preparations are aimed at armed action against the Germans. In no circumstances can they result in armed action against the [Soviets] who are entering our territories in hot pursuit of the Germans … The exception is in essential acts of self-defence, which is the right of every human being.[231]

> Clashes with Soviet partisan units should be avoided. As far as the regular Red Army units are concerned, when they arrive, the Polish commander, after having fought off the retreating Germans, is to appear openly before them and present himself as in charge of the area. With regard to the wishes of the Soviet army commanders, it should be stressed that the legal authorities are Polish and not Russian, and the nature and extent of Soviet activities should for the Polish citizens be determined by the legal Polish authority.[232]

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[229] The fighting order for the disarming operation is reproduced in Pełczyński, et al., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 3: 292–93 (see also 343–44); Prawdzic-Szlaski, *Nowogródczyzna w walce 1940–1945,* 111–12 (see also 110–12, 210–11); Erdman, *Droga do Ostrej Bramy,* 242–43; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 157. The order had fallen into Polish hands in early December 1943, when a copy was found in the possession of a captured leader of the Chapaiev (Chapayev) detachment. The document was sent immediately to the Home Army High Command in Warsaw (who questioned its authenticity), and then on to the Polish government in London. Word of this order spread quickly among the Polish partisans in this region, and added fuel to the fire.

[230] Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 186; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 158. The full report is found in Wojciech Roszkowski, ed., *Konflikty polsko-sowieckie 1942–1944: Dokumenty* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 1993), 103–105.

[231] Komisja Historyczna Polskiego Sztabu Głównego w Londynie, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej,* vol. 3: *Armia Krajowa,* 209–10, as cited in Davies, *Rising '44,* 206–7.

[232] Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, *Armia podziemna,* 6th edition (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1989), 174.

Thus, confrontations with Soviet partisans were to be avoided. Polish partisan formations which, because of past altercations, could not ensure proper relations with Soviet partisans were to be removed.[233] General Komorowski continued to urge cooperation with the Soviet partisans even after the events described below unfolded and reiterated his instructions on January 8, 1944.[234] This strategy turned out to be a blueprint for disaster, since it was the Soviets intention at all times to prevent the Poles from regaining their independence and reclaiming territory seized by the Soviet Union in September 1939. Once they had revealed themselves, the Polish partisans were earmarked for destruction. As the war drew to a close, many of them were captured by the Soviets and imprisoned or murdered.

After surrounding and disarming the Polish delegation consisting of about 25 men as they made their way to the Soviet base on December 1, 1943 (this was done by a unit led by Major Rafail Vasilevich), the Soviets struck what they hoped would be a final blow to the Polish partisans. Surprise attacks by the Stalin and Frunze Brigades were launched on the Polish partisan base in Drewiczna on Lake Kromań, where Miłaszewski's unit was stationed (by then Miłaszewski's unit had been transformed, as mentioned earlier, into a full-fledged Home Army battalion, *Batalion Stołpecki*), and on another Polish partisan camp in Derewno (or Derewna). Caught off guard, some 230 Poles were "disarmed." Anyone showing the least resistance was shot on the spot, in accordance with Soviet orders. The Polish camps were thoroughly plundered by the undisciplined Soviet partisans.[235] According to Soviet reports, ten Polish partisans were killed and eight injured in the ensuing melee in Derewno, in which two Soviet partisans were also wounded. Anti-Soviet elements were, according to orders from General Platon, to be "executed quietly, so that no one would know."[236] After a month-long interrogation, which resulted in death sentences being passed against them, five captured Polish underground leaders (including Miłaszewski and Pełka) were transported by plane to Moscow and interned in the Lubianka prison, where some of them perished; the

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[233] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 159.

[234] Ibid., 176–77.

[235] Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 155; Polskie Siły Zbrojne, Armia Krajowa, *Drogi cichociemnych,* 144.

[236] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 155; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 163–64, 301–302. General Ponomarenko's report to Stalin on the disarming, based on a report filed by General Dubov on December 4, 1943, spoke of the "disarming" of 230 partisans and stated that in the town of Derewno, "a group of Poles put up armed resistance, and as a result 10 Poles were killed and 8 wounded … We are interrogating those arrested. Please advise how we are to deal with them if an airplane does not arrive. In our opinion, they should be shot after being interrogated." In turn, General Platon wrote to General Dubov thanking him for an efficient operation and instructing him as follows: "The scoundrels, especially policemen, landowners, and settlers are to be shot quietly, so that no one would know." General Platon's order was supplemented by a similar order issued by General Dubov. During the Soviet occupation in 1939–1941, Grigorii Sidorok (sometimes given as Sidoruk), known as General Dubov, headed the NKVD in Iwieniec and oversaw the arrest and deportation of hundreds of Poles. Among the victims was the seminarian Henryk Żyźniewski, a member of the "Dąb" group that managed to escape from the Polish camp and was attacked by Soviet partisans. See Tadeusz Krahel, *Martyrologia duchowieństwa archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939–1945,* Second revised edition (Białystok: Buk, 2020), 560. See also Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 145.

remaining partisan leaders were executed locally.[237] Some Polish partisans were released after signing "declarations of loyalty." The remaining captured Polish partisans (about 135) were inducted into Soviet partisan units. More than thirty of them (and perhaps as many as 50) were executed when they attempted to "desert."[238] In actual fact, many of them were executed surreptitiously. (This is confirmed by Oswald Rufeisen, whose account is cited later.)

After the December 1, 1943 assault, the Soviet partisans embarked on a wide-scale "cleansing" operation directed at family members and supporters of the Home Army in the area.[239] Entire families were murdered, their property was plundered, and hamlets such as Babińsk, Izabelin, Olszaniec, and Szczepki were burned to the ground.[240] As could be expected, Polish retaliations followed.[241] From that point, there was open war between the Soviet and Polish partisans in the Nowogródek district—one that the Soviets had brought into being. Surprisingly, even after this juncture, from time to time the Polish partisan command attempted to negotiate a *modus vivendi* with the Soviets, and even to coordinate joint military actions

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[237] The head of the special NKVD investigative team which issued the indictment (and passed the death sentences) was David Zukhba, a Jew. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 120–21 (cf. 96 n.208); Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 164. The Polish leadership was accused of organizing and belonging to a "counter-revolutionary nationalist underground organization" which sanctioned "diversionary and terrorist activity intended to liquidate the Soviet partisans as (part of) a planned armed uprising against the Red Army." See Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 190.

[238] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 102 n.224; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 172–73.

[239] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 532, 538 (more than a dozen persons were killed in Kul, 16 men were shot to death in Dziawgi, 17 victims in Kulszyce, 14 victims in Prowżały, several dozen victims in Szczepki); Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 187. Reportedly, Polish women were captured and taken for the amusement of Soviet partisans. A concentration camp for political prisoners was even set up in Naliboki forest (most of the prisoners were soon executed). Those Poles whom the Soviets had difficulty apprehending were denounced to the Germans as possessing arms or belonging to underground organizations. See Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej,* 99–100. According to Jarosław Wołkonowski, Soviet partisans had already started to liquidate individual Poles as early as the spring of 1943, after the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers in Katyn and the severing of diplomatic relations with the Polish government in London. See Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 85. Over time, abuses directed at the civilian population became more frequent. Ibid., 126. Needless to add, Polish partisans retaliated and struck at Soviet partisans and their civilian collaborators. See Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 133–34.

[240] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 202–3.

[241] There were hundreds of Polish civilian victims, which prompted retaliations by the Polish underground. However, the extent of Polish retaliations was considerably smaller than murders of Poles by Soviet partisans and Belorussian nationalists. Moreover, the number of Belorussians killed by Poles has been grossly exaggerated in Soviet and Belorussian sources. It was certainly considerably smaller than the number of Belorussians killed by Soviet partisans, not to mention those killed by the Germans. This topic is canvassed extensively in Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 204–9. See also Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, "Stosunki narodowościowe w latach 1939–1948 na obszarze tzw. Zachodniej Białorusi," in Ciesielski, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1931–1948,* 292.

against the Germans, but these overtures were repeatedly rebuffed.[242] It was abundantly clear that unsobordinated partisan units would not be tolerated.

The following eyewitness account by Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra"), penned not long after the war, describes vividly how the disarming unfolded, its prelude, and its impact on the Polish partisans in that region.

> Our relations with the Soviets deteriorated sharply after the 11th November 1943. That day our units went to Mass in Derewno [or Derewna], and held a ceremonial parade there to celebrate Independence Day. A great number of people from Derewno and the surrounding country came to take part in the proceedings, and although we had great fears of German intervention, they did not materialise, and everything went off as arranged. The Soviets were very far from pleased with this observance of our National Day, and what angered them most was the speech of the Home Army Regional Commander, Second Lieutenant Swir [Aleksander Warakomski ("Świr")], who stressed that Poland was indivisible and that the nation would not allow any bargaining over the Republic's territory.
>
> From that time, open talk among the Soviets that we were Fascists and reactionaries became current, and spying on, and in, our units was intensified. In that same month the commander of our cavalry squadron was approached with the proposition that he should take his detachment over to the Soviets. Warrant Officer Noc [Zdzisław Nurkiewicz ("Noc")], who was promised the rank of a Soviet major, refused indignantly, saying that he would rather spend his life cleaning the boots of a Polish major than become a Soviet one.
>
> A few days later, his deputy, Sergeant Dab [Jan Jakubowski ("Dąb")], was approached with the same proposition, though with a very stylish addition, that he was to shoot his commander first. He was to receive the rank of captain. His reaction was similar to that of Warrant Officer Noc. Well before that, in October, a new officer had arrived to join our unit. He was Major "Waclaw" [Wacław Pełka], and in the first days of November he assumed command of the battalion. I then became second-in-command. Lieutenants Klin [Julian Bobrownicki ("Klin")] and Zator [Maciej Rzewuski ("Zator")], as well as Officer-Cadet Junosza, arrived with Waclaw. On 27th November, about a fortnight after the change of command, Waclaw and a few more officers received an invitation, signed by Dubow [General Dubov], from the Command of the United Soviet Brigades of the Iwieniec region, asking them to come to a war council to be held on the 30th of the

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[242] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 127–28, 137–39; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 179–80, 223–28. Attempts at reaching an understanding with the Soviets were doomed to failure because the Soviets never abandoned their goal of subjugating Poland; their overriding agenda was to gain a tactical advantage from any such arrangements. Soviet negotiators were not sincere in reaching a durable agreement with the Poles, and treated the meetings as a means to gather intelligence and to secure concessions. Polish efforts to reach an understanding with the Soviet partisans were duly noted by the Nazis: "Weitere umfangreiche Massnahmen werden sich gegen die polnischen Chauvinisten richten, die sich Hand in Hand mit Juden und Kommunisten in äusserst starker Weise deutschfeindlich betätigten." See Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht bis zum 15. Oktober 1941, OAM, 500–4–93, microfilm at RG–11.001M, reel 14, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. The trend continued for some time: "Die polnischen Widerstandsorganisationen unterhalten Zusammenhang mit kommunistischen Terrorgruppen und mit Juden," and "Trotz der weltanschaulischen und politischen Gegensätze die *russischen und polnischen Widerstandbewegungen* zur Zusammenarbeit gefunden." (Emphasis in the original.) See Einsatzgruppe A, Gesamtbericht vom 16. Oktober 1941 bis 31. Januar 1942, OAM, 500–4–91, microfilm at RG–11.001M, reel 14, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

month. As almost all those officers were away with various widely scattered detachments and outposts, and it was not possible to get them back at short notice, we sent a despatch rider with a message that our officers would arrive on 1st December 1943 at noon.

The officers designated for the talks arrived on the evening of the 30th. They were Lieutenants Lewald [Kacper Miłaszewski ("Lewald")], Ikwa [Ezechiel Łoś ("Ikwa")], and Waldan [Walenty Parchimowicz ("Waldan")]. They had not the least desire to go, and only consented to accompany the commander after the latter expressed a wish not far removed from a command. Eleven men from the cavalry squadron were to provide the escort.

The party was to leave at 6 a.m. on 1st December.

I woke up very early that morning. Hearing people move about outside, I began dressing in the darkness. I was almost ready when the major popped his head in through the door. "Are you up?" he asked. I answered that I was just coming out. When I came out the officers were ready; Waclaw swung himself into the saddle, and they rode off.

I remained outside and watched them disappear down the narrow path through the forest. A moment later I could only hear the sound of ice breaking under the horses' hooves. …

The quartermaster, Lieutenant Ludek [Ludwik Wierszyłowski ("Ludek")], came out of my hut, where he had been looking for me. He had prepared breakfast for those who had just gone, and had been up before me. Now he came to ask me to come to breakfast. We went into his hut. We had hardly finished our coffee and a slice of black bread, when the officer on duty, Officer-Cadet Mita, came in and reported that a Soviet patrol of five men on horseback had just arrived and requested to see someone in authority. I said that I would come out; but I was in no hurry. It was less dark when I came out. I started looking for the Soviet patrol and couldn't see it anywhere, so I just stood and watched the camp around me,

All the men were still asleep, that is, the eighty of them that were in camp at that time. The second company had its camp about a mile away, while the first company, almost the entire cavalry squadron, and a few more patrols—altogether about two hundred and fifty men—were away on various duties out in the country.

I turned around suddenly with a strange presentiment.

Three men were walking towards me along the path up which our officers had gone half an hour before. It was not light enough to see their faces, and only when I heard Major Wasiliewicz's [Rafail Vasilevich, the leader of the May 8, 1943 assault on the town of Naliboki—*M.P.*] voice did I realise that they were Russians.

"Well now, you, assemble your units for us!"

Lewald [Miłaszewski], unarmed and without his belt, his fur jerkin unbuttoned, stood between Wasiliewicz, who was armed with a sub-machine-gun, and another man similarly armed, both their weapons at the ready. It was to Lewald that Wasiliewicz had spoken.

At once I understood everything. Already, the sound of many footsteps in the snow was heard from the path, and several dense ranks of men, all with automatic weapons, emerged into the clearing. "That's probably the N.K.V.D.," I thought to myself. Just at that moment Janek Orlina, the chief clerk of the battalion's office, passed me a little way off. I called to him to run to Lieutenant Grom's [Lech Rydzewski ("Grom")] company to report that the officers invited to the war council had been disarmed and that the Soviets were already in the camp,

Meanwhile, Lewald was explaining something to Wasiliewicz, but the creaking of the snow drowned their voices. I stood behind a bush, unnoticed by anybody: then, somehow, quite

automatically, I followed Orlina to Grom's company. A few minutes later, a little before seven, we were in their camp. In a short time everybody was ready.

I gathered the officers and explained the situation to them. As I saw two alternatives before us, I asked for their answers to two questions; were we to attempt to liberate our comrades in the camp that had been overpowered, or were we to profit from our freedom and escape from the forest alone? With one accord they all opted for the march on the occupied camp.

For a fortnight, we had been playing hosts to a small Partisan unit from the Vilna [Wilno] district, who had already built themselves two huts. There were only about twenty of them, but they were ready for anything and everything, and had had quite a useful experience.

I decided that our guests, who had volunteered to join us, should attack the camp from the right, and the rest of the company, about seventy men, rather young and not yet well co-ordinated, from the left. We were to go into action at an agreed upon time, or at the first shots. I went out with our boys, right on ahead, with the advance guard. When we were halfway to the camp, we already had Soviet units in our rear, but we carried on just the same.

We got near enough to see a part of the camp between the branches. Our comrades were standing, unarmed, in three ranks in the small clearing. In front of them stood a row of Soviet Partisans with sub-machine-guns at the ready, and a machine-gun, trained on them, stood at each flank.

We had been noticed, and someone shouted that at the first shot from us they would open fire on our comrades.

In the face of this threat I could not bring myself to start the engagement. I left my companions and walked to the camp.

I soon reached the hut which was our headquarters, and looked round me. Our camp was a sight: I had never seen so many people there. The Soviets were plundering everywhere, looking for papers, documents, gold and treasures, but most of all, watches. They pulled legs out of the walls and tore out door and window frames. The place was crawling with them, every one of them looking for something to grab and steal. There seemed to be no one in authority. The only place where there was order was among those guarding our men. I stood at the side with a few of our officers: it didn't seem as if we were being watched. I turned to the Regional Commander, Swir, whom ill luck had brought to us on a visit the day before.

"You must get away." "Yes, but how?" At the moment a few shots rang out from the direction whence the party of Partisans from Vilna was supposed to approach. The three ranks of men flattened themselves on the ground, while their guards fired a few bursts over their heads.

Behind the barracks, Lieutenant Grom was struggling valiantly not to be disarmed, but finally he was brutally overwhelmed, and succumbed.

I estimated the number of Soviets in our camp at about one thousand five hundred [an overestimate—*M.P.*], but this wasn't the lot, as a considerable number were posed outside as cover and sentries.

Among the Soviets I recognised our former "friends", together with Marusia, the wife of the commander of the Frunze Brigade. They had often been our visitors and guests, though they must have been preparing this attack for quite some time. Two of our own men, Private Wankowicz [Czesw Wańkowicz] and Lance Corporal [Antoni] Tararaj, were conspicuous among the Soviets; they were both armed. We had suspected them for a long time, but had no clear proof that they were

working for the Soviets. Fortune, however, is a capricious lady. A few weeks later Tararaj fell into our hands.[243]

Now and again there were single shots from the forest; those were our guests from Vilna giving signs of life.

Major Wasiliewicz came out before the men on the ground, told them to get up, and added whether anyone would go and tell those sons of bitches in the wood that there was no sense in further fighting, and ask them to surrender.

The three ranks stood in dead silence for a long while, then Przywara [Tadeusz Maszewski ("Przywara") came forward, followed by Corporal Zbik [Żbik]. As they passed me, on an impulse I joined in and walked on between the two of them. Fortunately no one took any notice of this, as there were swarms of soldiers milling around everywhere. Only at the brook, still inside the camp, we were stopped by a slant-eyed creature, probably a sentry. Przywara had to use all his eloquence to explain our mission to him, producing a dirty handkerchief tied on a stick as evidence. We were stopped a few more times after that; at one of these checks the Soviet sentry was curious to know why I was still armed, but Przywara managed to explain that, too.

In the first clearing we came to we found one of the boys from Vilna, who was wounded. Zbik stayed with him and Przywara and I went on. Finally we reached our men. Lieutenant Adam, the second-in-command of the detachment, was wounded in the leg.

No one, of course, thought of surrendering. Straight away we started on our way out of the woods. As was to be expected, all the roads out of the forest were well guarded, and our march was rendered even more difficult. It took us seven hours to cross less than three miles of swamp. We took turns to carry Adam.

I walked first, holding a thick and long stick in my hand. The bog was covered by a layer of ice about an inch and a half thick, which gave way under our feet. With every step there was the illusion that the ice would hold, and with every step there was the disappointment when one's feet plunged into the icy much underneath. We got stuck up to a little above our knees on the average, but at one time I was plunged up to my armpits, and my companions only just managed to pull me out. Every fifty steps we stopped for a short rest. As we got more and more tired the distance between rests was reduced to twenty steps, and then to ten.

With the exception of myself no one had eaten anything that day. Our clothing, soaked in the mud, kept freezing. Whenever we stopped, we found after a minute that we could not bend our legs, as our trousers and underclothes had frozen solid. A sweetish stench exuded from the bog and made me feel thoroughly sick. It was particularly obnoxious near streams and small rivulet. Dead tired myself, I admired the untiring energy with which our nurse Irka tended Adam's wounds every time we stopped. It was getting dark as we got to the end of the swamp: what a joy it was to put one's feet on really firm ground! But although the ground was easier, we walked even more slowly. We had come out of the swamp with hardly anything left of our boot, and with our clothing torn to shreds. We could not follow the roads or paths as they were all held by the Soviets, and we had to force our way through the undergrowth. Fortunately, while crossing a strip of young saplings, we came upon some huts and shanties where a handful of people from the burned-out belt [i.e., the area cleared by the Germans in the summer of 1943 during Operation Hermann—*M.P.*] had made their

[243] See also Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 539. *M.P.*

homes. These people, who up to a short time before had lived in their own houses on their own land, now lived in indescribable misery, but nevertheless they shared with us all they had.

It wasn't until I'd had a rest and swallowed a few potatoes and some spoonfuls of soup that I felt myself going to pieces. Physically I had reached the limit of my endurance, and my mental state was even worse than my physical. I thought of all my comrades taken prisoner, and wondered whether they were still alive.

Before midnight we got to the first houses beyond the burned belt, in a village called Brodek. There we learned of the tragic fate which had befallen our first company, stationed at Derewno. That morning they had been treacherously attacked by one of the Soviet brigades; and after some of our men had taken to arms, ten of them were put against the wall and shot. The few who were wounded were finished off, but not before they had been hideously tortured. Some were kicked to death, others had their fingers and ears cut off. The rest, with Lieutenant Jar [Jarosław Gąsiewski ("Jar")], were taken to the forest under escort.

A few days later we came upon Warrant Officer Noc, who had been out on a patrol with his squadron, collecting those who had escaped from the Soviets.

The first news began to reach us from the forest. Frolow [Frolov], a Soviet citizen married to a Polish girl, who had earlier refused to join the Soviets and had remained with us, had been hanged. The brothers Skrodzki had been killed in an appalling fashion. Their ears, cut off while they were still alive, were fried, and men were forced to eat this "dish". It sickens me to write about such things, but they cannot be passed over in silence.

In the spring, after the snows had melted, half-decomposed bodies were often found in and around the forest, and families and friends recognised them for those of their dear ones. According to unconfirmed reports half of our officers had been shot somewhere in the centre of the forest.

And this was only 1st December 1943. The front line was till some five hundred miles to the east, while here the fight was being waged, not against the Germans—no, they were not touched—but against the owners of the country, whose only fault was that they were Poles. And at the same time [the Polish authorities in] London instructed by radio: "Units of the Home Army are to reveal themselves to the Soviet front-line commanders."

After the lesson I received that fateful day I no longer bothered to obey these instructions, and I know that I thereby earned the gratitude of the men under my command, who, being on the spot, had a better opportunity of correctly assessing the situation than had the statesmen in London.[244]

After the attack on the Stołpce battalion, there was an open state of war between the Polish and Soviet partisans in northeastern Poland.[245] The Soviet partisans mounted formidable assaults on the poorly armed Polish partisans, targeting especially those units that had emerged from the remnants of the disarmed Polish partisans, namely, the Fifth Brigade of the 14th Home Army Division under the command of Lieutenant Zygmunt Szendzielarz (*nom de guerre* "Łupaszko"—"Lupashka" in Soviet documents) and a detachment

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[244] Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 152–58.

[245] As was to be expected, the remnants of Miłaszewski's unit retaliated against the Soviet partisans in that area. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 96, 98.

of the Stołpce battalion under the command of Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra").[246] In mid–December 1943, two weeks after the assault on the Stołpce battalion, Andrzej Kutzner's unit, stationed in the village of Duszkowo near Raków, was attacked by Soviet partisans and suffered heavy losses. On February 2, 1944, after a pitched battle with the Germans in Worziany that resulted in scores of casualties, the Fifth Brigade of the 14th Home Army Division under the command of Zygmunt Szendzielarz ("Łupaszko") was attacked by the combined forces of the Gastello, Voroshilov and Rokossovsky Brigades near the village of Radziusze.[247] This attack, which is described in more detail later, occurred the day after the Poles had been invited to a meeting with the Soviet leadership.[248] Dismayed by their unsuccessful assault on the Polish forces, the Soviet partisans vowed to wipe out the families of Home Army members[249]; they took to "pacifying" scores of Polish villages suspected of supporting the Home Army.[250]

As historian Michał Gnatowski points out, in the majority of cases it was the Soviet side that was the aggressor; Poles engaged in sporadic retaliatory operations and shot back when fired at by Soviet partisans in chance encounters.[251] Gnatowski has argued compellingly that the principal goal of the Soviet partisans was not to fight the Germans, but to to seize control of the area and eliminate the Polish underground.[252] The net outcome was that this new battle front undermined the effectiveness of the Polish underground struggle against the Germans. Although the Soviets themselves created this state of affairs, Soviet propaganda then exploited the situation by blaming the Polish underground and tarring them as Nazi

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[246] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 12. Some of these assaults, and Polish retaliatory strikes, are chronicled in Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 532–35, and Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 201.

[247] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 161–63, 206–207; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 180; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńzczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 50.

[248] Brzozowski, *"Burza" na Kresach Wschodnich,* 48, 56; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej w pierwszej połowie 1944 roku na Wileńszczyźnie," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 167.

[249] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Antyakowskie specjalne wydziały i wywiad baranowickiego zgrupowania partyzantki sowieckiej," in Polak, *Zbrodnie NKWD na obszarze województw wschodnich Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej,* 267, 269–70. For example, in January 1944, a reconnaissance group from the Chapaiev unit killed the family of an AK member in the village of Zabrodzie near Iwieniec. There were many such incidents which took the lives of thousands of civilians.

[250] Chmielarz, "'Sojusznik naszych sojuszników': Stosunek ZSRR do Armii Krajowej," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 188.

[251] Gnatowski, "Dokumenty o stosunku radzieckiego kierownictwa do polskiej konspiracji niepodległościowej na północno-wschodnich Kresach Rzeczypospolitej w latach 1943–1944," *Studia Podlaskie,* no. 5 (1995): 214.

[252] Michał Gnatowski, "Kulisy radzieckich starań o ponowne włączenie regionu białostockiego w skład ZSRR (1942–1944)," *Studia Podlaskie,* vol. 10 (2000): 62. See also the Soviet documents reproduced on pp. 339–80.

collaborators. The effects of this propaganda linger to this day in historical writings, both post-Soviet and Western, most notably in Jewish historiography.

Aware of the fate of ill-equipped Polish partisans, who were being hunted down ruthlessly by Soviet partisans, the Germans attempted to turn this to their advantage. In mid-December 1943, the German gendarmerie in Iwieniec proposed a temporary ceasefire to a Home Army unit under the command of Lieutenant Józef Świda ("Lech"), in exchange for weapons. No conditions were atttached other than to continue to fight the Soviet partisans, which at that point had become both a reality and a necessity given the Soviet actions. The Germans would leave supplies of arms and ammunition at lightly staffed outposts, and the Poles would then seize them. (Since the Home Army did not receive military supplies from the Home Army supreme command, it had to acquire weapons on its own, both on the black market and from individual German soldiers.) This informal arrangement allowed Poles to defend themselves more effectively from relentless Soviet attacks. The Germans believed that they would also benefit from fighting between the Soviet and Polish partisans, as both the Soviets and Poles were less likely to attack German outposts. However, the Polish partisans never subordinated themselves to the Germans, nor did they participate in any joint military operations with the Germans against the Soviet forces.[253] Moreover, as German reports make clear, only two Polish units in the Nowogródek District participated in these dealings. (As mentioned earlier, in addition to Świda, the Germans also approached Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra"), the deputy head of the Stołpce Battalion.) Throughout this period the remaining Home Army units continued to carry out attacks on German garrisons and other positions.[254] Indeed, such attacks were more frequent than those carried out by the Soviet partisans. The Germans eventually regretted having entered into negotiations with the Poles as the Home Army managed to strengthen its position in relation to the Germans, and ultimately the arrangement caused more harm to the German side than the potential benefit they had hoped to gain.[255] As mentioned earlier, these dealings, which were kept secret, were entered into with the Germans by local Home Army commanders without authorization from the Home Army command. In fact, not fully appreciating the predicament of the Home Army in the Nowogródek region, the Home Army supreme command as well as the Polish government in exile condemned these arrangements. A death sentence was even passed against Świda, one of the local Home Army commanders, which fortunately was not carried out.

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[253] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 100 n.220; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 125–26, 128–29; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 176–89; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 173–81.

[254] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 187–88; Aliaksei Litvin, *Akuptsyia Belarusi (1941–1944): Pytanni supratsivu i kalabaratsyi* (Minsk: Belaruski knihazbor, 2000), 152.

[255] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 187–88; Krajewski, *Dopalanie Kresów,* 50.

Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 184–85. See also Erdman, *Droga do Ostrej Bramy,* 245, 252–53. Erdman describes some of the short-lived contacts with the Germans at pp. 245–55. See also Kuźmiński, *Z Iwieńca i Stołpców do Białegostoku.*

That individual units of the Polish underground occasionally accepted German overtures should not be surprising given the repeated acts of treachery on the part of the Soviets, and the relentless hunt for the remnants of the Polish partisans after their units were "disarmed" by the Soviets. By the end of 1943, the Red Army approaching the borders of Poland and the Soviet partisans were rightly regarded as enemies more dangerous than the retreating Germans. It is important to note that these arrangements were not broad-based but local in nature, and were undertaken out of necessity in response to Soviet aggression. They constituted a tactical, short-lived strategy entered into purely for self-defence, with no political dimension regarding German-Polish relations.[256] Moreover, they provided the Polish underground with an opportunity to rebuild its strength. Afterwards, Polish forces in this area engaged the Germans in a pitched battle for Wilno. The temporary ceasefire did not turn the Poles into political or ideological allies of the Nazis, nor did it signify the type of collaboration the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany engaged in openly from 1939 to 1941, and the Soviets continued to be guilty of throughout much of the war. During the Warsaw Uprising of August 1944, the Soviet Union again became a *de facto* ally of Nazi Germany as Soviet forces stood by idly while the Germans crushed the Poles' pro-independentist insurgency, a goal that the Soviets espoused in equal measure with the Nazis.

It is an open question to what extent the conduct of the Soviet and Jewish partisans in this region impacted on relations between Poles and Soviet and Jewish partisans in other parts Poland. News of the assaults on Polish partisans in northeastern Poland soon spread to central Poland and further soured Polish-Soviet (as well as Polish-Jewish) relations.[257] How do the Jews who served with the Soviet partisans see these same events? Their testimonies follow the overview of Jewish historiography on this topic.

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[256] Israeli historian Yitzhak Arad concedes: "The AK-German arrangements were tactical, military amd local, with no political dimension regarding German-Polish relations." See Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 193.

[257] Soviet sources from April 1944 indicate that this matter was reported in *Nasz Głos*, a Lublin-based publication. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 169. A flyer issued by the Stronnictwo Narodowe (National Party) in the Sandomierz district in 1944, in response to propaganda disseminated by the Communist Polish Workers' Party, also referred to the December 1943 assault on Polish partisans in Naliboki forest. See Chodakiewicz, *Tajne oblicze GL-AL i PPR,* vol. 3, 144.

6. Jewish Historiography

Traditional Jewish historiography has difficulty distancing itself from wartime Soviet propaganda, and is generally oblivious to the fate of the Poles. Jewish historians accuse the Polish underground of provoking the quarrel with the Soviets and, especially, targeting Jewish partisans. Whether because of the actions of local commanders or following "orders" from the Polish government in exile, the Polish underground is blamed for the bad relations with the Soviet partisans. Rarely, if ever, do Jewish historians refer to Soviet archival materials that discredit this interpretation. Jewish nationalist historians even justify the massacre of Polish partisans in which Jews took part.

Without offering any evidence of the existence of such an order, Shalom Cholawski, a former partisan turned historian, claims in typical fashion:

> In the beginning of September 1943, Polish units received orders to hit Russian and Jewish partisan units. We were now waging war against the Poles and the Germans, and it was not long before fighters in our brigade had an encounter with the new enemy. Harkavi and his group, while on an operation [most likely an "economic" one—*M.P.*] in the Naliboki region, were attacked by a band of armed Poles. … The news of the battle and the Polish betrayal spread quickly through the Naliboki forests.[258]

The assessment proffered by Israeli historian Dov Levin, also a former partisan, is rather similar:

> As the front approached Lithuania, the hostile activity of the Polish underground forces, which were connected with the Polish government-in-exile in London and were known as the AK (*Armia Krajowa*), increased sharply. In that area, the AK was nicknamed "White Poles," and one of their aims was to take control of the Vilna area [i.e., the prewar Polish province of Wilno—*M.P.*] after the Germans' retreat, in order to create a situation that would facilitate *de facto* the Polish annexation [sic] of the area after the war. Despite attempts to negotiate [sic] with them, the Poles in eastern Lithuania became dangerous and cruel adversaries of Soviet partisans in general, and of the Jews among them in particular.[259]

Shmuel Krakowski, a specialist on partisan affairs at Yad Vashem, takes an even more strident view, purveying baseless claims that are in keeping with the crudest forms of Soviet wartime propaganda.

> The main Polish underground forces, subordinated to the Delegatura [i.e., the civilian administration of the Home Delegate of the Polish government in exile—*M.P.*] and supported by the right-wing groups [i.e., virtually everyone but the Communist fringe], strove to ensure the

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[258] Shalom Cholawski, *Soldiers from the Ghetto* (San Diego: A.S. Barnes & Company, 1980), 162.

[259] Levin, *Fighting Back,* 182.

> reestablishment of Poland in its prewar eastern frontiers. To reach this goal, a bitter struggle *was launched against Soviet partisans* in the east …[260]

Other academics—such as Yehuda Bauer, who does so *ad nauseam* in a recent study—attribute the problem largely to endemic Polish anti-Semitism:

> Polish nationalist guerrillas in the north engaged in killings of Jews …[261]

> after a while the Polish AK established its underground organization there, and the AK was against Jews and actively killed them … For the Jews, the Soviet partisans were the only hope for survival, and they fought with the Soviets against the AK. Polish anti-Semitism and the political situation combined to make bitter enmity between the AK and the Jews.
>
> … so called-White Poles, members of AK detachments, regularly disarmed and murdered Jews in the forests of western Belorussia and the Vilno [Wilno] region.[262]

> the "official" Polish Polish underground, the one connected with the Polish government-in-exile, was motivated both by political considerations and also by virulent anti-Semitism, which expressed itself, especially in 1943–1944, in murderous attacks by Polish guerilla units against Jews.[263]

> In the Belorussian areas, the official Polish underground of the Armia Krajowa murdered Jews, especially in the latter stages of the war. This was because the Armia Krajowa's main opponent was the Soviets, and the Jews fought in the Soviet units; but the special venom with which Jews were sought out to be killed shows the deep-seated Polish anti-Semitism in these areas.[264]

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[260] See Shmuel Krakowski, "The Attitude of the Polish Underground to the Jewish Question during the Second World War," in Joshua D. Zimmerman, ed., *Contested Memories: Poles and Jews during the Holocaust and Its Aftermath* (New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 103. For good measure, Krakowski takes Polish authors to task for their supposed nationalistic myopia: "Unfortunately, the mass of apologetic writing is a serious obstacle to understanding the complicated problems of this tragic past." Ibid., 104. In her study on the Bielski partisans, Nechama Tec acknowledges her gratitude to Krakowski as her historical mentor: "I am indebted to Shmuel Krakowski, chief archivist at Yad Vashem, who, from the beginning, urged me to conduct this study. For years Krakowski had been supplying me with important advice, information, and documents. He also carefully read the entire book and offered valuable comments." See Tec, *Defiance,* xii. Krakowski's mark is quite evident in her views of the Home Army and its relations with the Soviet partisans.

[261] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 72. Bauer's lack of expertise in this area is apparent from the following statement found at p. 132: "Pro-Soviet Polish partisan units existed as well, and they, too, were allowed to exist as quasi-national groups. More than 2,000 fighters operated in the north-western area of the kresy near Vilno [Wilno] as members of such a group, and another four such groups operated in northern Volhynia." While there were such Polish partisan units in Volhynia because of the belated formation of the Home Army in that area and the immediate need for self-defence from Ukrainian nationalist partisans, there was no such group operating in the Wilno area.

[262] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 113–14.

[263] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 155.

[264] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 168.

Leonid Smilovitsky, an emigré from the former Soviet Union, belongs to the new wave of Israeli historians who maintain that the lack of access to Soviet archives did not enable scholars in the West to write objectively about what transpired in "Western Belorussia." He therefore undertook a scientific study to accomplish this long overdue task. However, the conclusions he arrives at do not differ substantially from the ones noted above. In his view, the Poles were clearly the culprits and responsible for the worsening relations between the Soviet and Polish partisans. Smilovitsky ignores pivotal events such the massacre of some 130 Poles in Naliboki in May 1943. He attributes the hostilities in the area to the actions of the Polish government in exile who, allegedly, unilaterally declared the USSR to be the enemy of Poland after the breakdown in diplomatic relations between the two countries in the wake of the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers in Katyn. Without providing any meaningful chronolgy, Smilovitsky alleges that Polish partisans "terrorized" the civilian population, attacked Soviet partisans and perpetrated "atrocities" against them, and, as begets vicious anti-Semites, they methodically murdered Jews. In fact, it was Stalin who broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government in exile in April 1943. Henceforth, Soviet partisan propaganda dubbed the Polish Prime Minister General Władysław Sikorski's policy as "criminal and hostile to the people." According to a propaganda directive, one was to talk "about Polish Legionaries [the Home Army] as the protégés of the Gestapo." The language of propaganda pervaded the military correspondence as well. A Soviet commander wrote about "the archenemy of our Fatherland: the German occupiers and their Polish lackeys." Polish guerrilla groups were described as "hostile toward Soviet power" and allegedly included "notorious fascists." A top secret order of May 1943 proclaimed: "Poles fighting against the [Soviet] partisans are German agents and enemies of the Polish people." On June 24, 1943, the Soviet partisan leadership authorized the denunciation of the Polish underground to the Nazis. Later, orders went out to "shoot the [Polish] leaders" and "discredit, disarm, and dissolve" their units. On December 5, 1943, it was resolved that "the [NKVD] Chkalov Brigade should commence the cleansing of the area from the White Polish bands … The band, especially policemen, landlords, and settlers, are to be shot. But no one is allowed to learn about this."[265] Feigning friendship, the Soviets lured at least two sizable Polish partisan detachments to their destruction. At first the Poles sought reconciliation. Later, they fought back. By fall 1943, a full-fledged local Soviet-Polish war raged in the northeastern Borderlands.

In a display of unseemly chauvinism unworthy of a serious scholar, Smilovitsky claims that the Soviet partisans simply "borrowed the fighting methods of their enemy." While acknowledging in passing the "disarming" of Polish partisans of Burzyński and Miłaszewski, Smilovitsky does not bother to mention that the Soviets actually murdered scores of those whom they "disarmed" and situates these events out of context, as justified retaliation. He accuses the "extremist" Home Army supreme command and its local representatives of cooperating with the Nazis against the Soviets (the Germans' erstwhile allies). He charges the Polish underground with displaying "great cruelty" toward the civilian population suspected of sympathizing with the Soviet partisans. According to Smilovitsky, when the Polish side finally came to its senses and expressed an intention "to abandon confrontation and to move toward interaction" with the

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[265] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 122, 134, 144, 227–28, 233, 250–51.

Soviet partisans, it was too late. Needless to add, "Anti-Semitism was widespread among the fighters of Armia Krajowa and of the grouping National Armed Forces," even though the latter were not active in this area. According to Smilovitsky's simplistic narrative, "Jews were regarded as a 'pro-Soviet element'—they were persecuted and killed."[266]

If that was the entire story, however, one would be hard-pressed to account for rescue efforts on behalf of Jews undertaken by members of the Polish underground. The following biographies simply do not fit the stereotypical mould pushed by Holocaust historians. The Perewoski family from Wilno took refuge in an area located between the towns of Gródek (or Horodek) and Radoszkowice, near the prewar Polish-Soviet border. A number of Poles who were declared to be Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem, including Home Army members and the local priest, came to their assistance. One of them, Tadeusz Korsak, an organizer and senior member of the Polish underground, was abducted by the Chkalov Brigade in September 1943. Refusing to become an informer, he was executed on October 8, 1943. Korsak, as well as many other Polish underground activists, was denounced by Adam Świętorzecki, a Polish Jew who had deserted from the ranks of the Polish underground and joined the Soviet partisans.[267]

> When war broke out, Shmuel and Dora Perewoski were living in Vilna [Wilno] with their two small children, Eli (Leszek) (b. 1935) and Celina (b. 1939). The family owned a lumber business. After the first wave of killings, Shmuel realized the hopelessness of the situation and in early 1942 decided to smuggle his family out of the ghetto. Tadeusz Korsak, a prewar business acquaintance, offered to help. The first to be taken out of the ghetto was Eli. Shmuel, who was employed in forced labor outside the ghetto, took his son out of the ghetto with him in the morning, concealing him among the lines of Jews marching to their work place. The children's former nanny, a non-Jew, was waiting at a pre-appointed place on the street, and took Eli to a temporary hiding place. Soon his mother and sister joined him. Then the nanny took them in a horse-drawn cart to Korsak's home in the village of Balcery (today in Belarus). Sometime later, Shmuel escaped from the ghetto and arrived in Balcery. The reunited family lived in the basement of the Korsak home under the guise of a Polish family. Young Eli even served in the local church as altar boy. [Probably to Rev. Stanisław Budnik, the pastor of Gródek—*M.P.*]
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> The danger for both families—the Jews and their rescuers—was very high. In addition to possibly being detected by the Germans, they were threatened by the pervasive enmity between ethnic groups in the region as well as political struggles between the Polish national underground and the Soviet-oriented partisans. One day in the summer of 1943, Shmuel was captured by Soviet partisans. The following day his body was found in the fields, riddled with bullets. Eight-year-old Eli, his mother and Tadeusz Korsak identified the body and secretly buried it. Many years later, Eli tried in vain to relocate the burial place.
>
> Locals began to grow more and more suspicious of the family living with the Korsaks, and the situation became very precarious. Eli and Dora escaped to the forests and joined the partisans. Three-year-old Celina stayed with the Korsaks, who promised to take good care of her until the war

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[266] Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 129–46.

[267] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 104–5, 143–44; Krajewski, *Na straconych posterunkach,* 160–62.

> was over. However, the Korsak family, too, fell victim to the turbulent times. A few months after the death of Shmuel Perewoski, Tadeusz Korsak and his two daughters were also murdered by Soviet partisans. Władysława, who had lost her entire family, took Celina and fled to her relatives, Jan and Maria Michałowski, who lived in the small village of Jerozolimka. Although the Michałowskis had five children of their own, they took in Celina and cared for her until liberation, when her mother and brother came to collect her. [268]

The fate of Teresa Dołęga-Wrzosek, a native of Warsaw who lived in Stołowicze, near Baranowicze, during the occupation, is equally telling. Dołęga-Wrzoszek was a liaison officer for the Home Army who carried messages between Home Army units stationed in Naliboki forest and the Soviet partisans. Before the liquidation of the ghetto in Stołowicze, she was entrusted with the care of a Jewish boy, Ryszard Węgier (Richard Wanger), called Rysiek, whose parents also hailed from Warsaw. Dołęga-Wrzoszek also took in Gittl, the daughter of the local rabbi, who was hidden in a barn. Gittl's presence was detected and she was executed by an SS-man, who was accompanied by two Belorussian policemen. Miraculously, Dołęga-Wrzosek was spared when her young daughter threw herself on her mother to protect her from being shot. Young Rysiek, who moved from house to house, staying with friends of Dołęga-Wrzosek and passing as Catholic, survived. Dołęga-Wroszek was recognized posthumously by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile. She too fell afoul of the Soviet partisans, as had Tadeusz Korsak and many other Poles. In March 1944, she was denounced to the Germans. Arrested together with six other Home Army members, she was imprisoned in Kołdyszewo, where she was tortured to disclose her underground network. Because the Germans were then in retreat, she managed to survive, only to be rearrested by the NKVD for allegedly collaborating with the Germans. After being interrogated for several months she was released in a very poor state of health and died soon after.[269]

The memoirs of Pola Wawer (née Komaj), a Jewish doctor from Wilno, also attest to extensive assistance from many Poles, including members of the Home Army, in the Wilno area where she and her mother survived the war. While residing in Szyrwinty (Širvintos) with Emilia and Wojciech Pogorzelski, who were both doctors and active in the Home Army, protection was extended to her by Franciszek Burdynowski, the Home Army organizer in the Wiłkomierz (Ukmergė) region. Her principal benefactors, the Pogorzelskis, were honoured by Yad Vashem.[270] Another local Home Army Commmander who sheltered and protected

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[268] Korsak Family, The Righteous Database, Yad Vashem, Internet: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=6202407>.

[269] Aleksander Pruszyński, "Wracam na swoje: Białoruś—wczoraj, dziś, jutro," *Goniec* (Mississauga), December 7–13, 2007 (Part 33) and December 14–20, 2007 (Part 34). See also Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part One, 182 (Dolenga-Wrzoszek); Testimony of Elżbieta Wrzosek, Archiwum Historii Mówionej, Internet: <https://audiohistoria.pl/nagranie/1056-AHM_PnW_0887>; Testimony of Elzbieta Dolega-Wrzosek, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, University of Southern California Interview code 39086.

[270] Pola Wawer, *Poza gettem i obozem* (Warsaw: Volumen, 1993), especially at pp. 97–100; Michał Grynberg, *Księga sprawiedliwych* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 421–23; Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 626–27.

Jews was Bronisław Krzyżanowski. He too was recognized as a Righteous Gentile,[271] as was Helena Sztutkowska of Wilno, a lawyer and active member of the Home Army who used her contacts to obtain false documents and shelters for Jews in the countryside.[272]

Emanuela and Stanisław Cunge, natives of Łódź who took refuge in Wilno at the beginning of the war and converted to Catholicism, passed as Poles in the vicinity of Żodziszki near Smorgonie. They mixed in the company of many friendly and helpful Polish and Belorussian landowners, professionals and Catholic priests who were supporters of the Home Army. Although some of these people knew of their Jewish background and others suspected it, the Cunges did not encounter any anti-Semitism. When friends of theirs, the Holcmans, who were sheltered by Polish landowners near Oszmiana, were denounced to the Germans, the Home Army passed a death sentence on the denouncer and executed him. Emanuela Cunge's life was also threatened, though not by Poles but by Soviet partisans who robbed and set fire to the estate of the Mierzejewski family in Ruskie Sioło where she was staying with her son. After murdering the Polish landlord and a Soviet prisoner of war who worked there, the partisans wanted to kill Emanuela Cunge, whom they mistook for the landlord's wife who happened to be away, and her young son. After pleading with her assailant, she and her child were spared (the partisan fired his gun into the air to avoid the suspicion of his fellow partisans, among them a woman) but were left in the burning manor and narrowly escaped death. Soviet partisans also robbed an estate in nearby Tupalszczyzna where Emanuela Cunge was to relocate, killing Hilary Głuszka. Cunge mentions the daring and successful Home Army assault on the German gendarmes and Belorussian police in Żodziszki and confirms that Belorussians of the Orthodox faith who sheltered her willingly joined the Polish Home Army.[273]

Szoszana Dezent, a young Jewish woman from Wilno, found refuge with the Raczyński family, proprietors of a small estate in Wiegielino located between the towns of Podbrodzie and Niemenczyn. The Raczyński family and their relatives came to the assistance of dozens of Jews. On one occasion, Szoszana and her main protector, Stefan Raczyński, had an encounter with a group of looters who were perhaps associated with the Home Army. The intervention of a priest saved them and resulted in repercussions for the marauders.

> Stefan [Raczyński] drove me to his father's sister, far away, and he said that, because the young ones were in danger, since both the Germans and Lithuanians were killing them [Lithuanian collaborators had staged raids on Polish homesteads—*M.P.*], he would seek shelter for both him

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[271] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 411–12. Bronisław Krzyżanowski and his wife Helena sheltered Guta Baran and her son Zeev, as well as her relatives Sofi Rachel and Gegory Baran. For additional examples of assistance provided to Jews by members of the Home Army see Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 38.

[272] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 793–94.

[273] Emanuela Cunge, *Uciec przed Holocaustem* (Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, 1997), 182–307, especially 216–21, 239, 247, 253, 261, 274, 282, 290–92, 302. After the "liberation" the Cunges obtained good positions in Wilno. They became part of the privileged Soviet elite who had access to goods not readily available to the general population. Ibid., 305–307.

and me.

And there was hardship again. Armed looters, some of them dressed in Polish uniforms, were attacking peasant houses and they were taking food as well as valuable things in order to have money for vodka. Such were the times, the law did not function. The war was the law.

And they caught Stefan and me. They thought it out at once that Stefan had got away from somewhere, since he wasn't from those parts, and that I was a Jewess he was protecting. They put me against the wall and wanted to shoot me, and they beat Stefan up. He kept repeating that it wasn't true that I was Jewish.

And Aunt ran to the vicar, who lived nearby, and told him that there was trouble brewing, because they wanted to shoot Stefan. The priest followed her immediately to the farm, looked at those bandits and asked, 'And what are you doing here?'

'We want to cook this little yid's goose,' they said.

'She's not a Jewess. I baptized her myself. And Stefan is a boy of our parish,' said the priest. [These statements were untrue.—*M.P.*]

And thus the priest saved our lives. Later, we learnt that those looters, who posed as freedom fighters, got into trouble, because news spread that they had attacked innocent people and that the priest had had to intervene. Their commander demoted them and they got imprisoned, or something like that.

From there we went to Stefan's mother's brother, to another parish, because we did not want to cause his aunt any more trouble. In fact Stefan had been born there, his birth certificate had been issued there.

What wonderful people they were, the uncle and his wife.[274]

Indeed, if one were to rely—as most Holocaust historians do—exclusively on Jewish anecdotal literature such as the accounts set out below, which are highly selective and succumb to denial, one would be left with a terribly skewed picture of Polish-Jewish relations.

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[274] Account of Szoszana Raczyńska Elżbieta Isakiewicz, *Harmonica: Jews Relate How Poles Saved Them from the Holocaust* (Warsaw: Polska Agencja Informacyjna, 2001), 96. See also Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 656–57; Rescuers Bios, "Shtetl," PBS Frontline, Internet: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/righteous/stephan.html>. Some time toward the end of 1944, Stefan Raczyński was rounded up by the NKVD along with many other Poles from the area and imprisoned. Miraculously, he gained his release only after repeated intercessions by Szoszana Dezent (whom he later married), who started a petition which some Jewish survivors whom Stefan had helped agreed to sign. The Raczyński family's property was confiscated by the Soviets. See Isakiewicz, *Harmonica,* 96–98. Another similar incident involved a group of Jews, at least seven of them, who were sheltered by Józef and Jadwiga Dąbrowski on an isolated farmstead near Kamionka near Ostrowiec. Since the Dąbrowski family was large and could not feed these additional people, the Jewish charges would steal food and rob farmers in the vicinity. When word of this reached the Polish underground, a group of Home Army men arrived at the Dąbrowski farm and ordered the Jews out of their shelter. Apparently, the host was beaten and his horse and wagon were seized. When the Jews were being led away, a priest (chaplain?) who accompanied the partisans arrived and persuaded them not to harm the Jews. The Jews returned to their hideout and remained there until early 1944, when most of them left for other hiding places. The account of the Dąbrowskis' rescue in Israel Gutman, ed., *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust: Supplementary Volumes (2000–2005)* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2010), volume II, 544, downplays the aspect of retaliation for robbery.

> At first, recalled Jacob Greenstein, AK [Armia Krajowa] partisans in the Naliboki Forest were willing to work side by side with Jewish and Soviet fighters. Then, in December, 1943, the Poles received an order from London "to get rid of the Red partisans, especially the Jews."[275]
>
> The Polish partisans were all the time our allies until the Soviets started winning and moving towards the former Polish borders. They didn't want them on their land, knowing, from experience, once they stepped in they would seldom leave. Well, they decided, first of all, to wage a war against the Jewish partisans. What else? Logical, wasn't it?[276]
>
> Soon we were faced with a plague of White Poles,—that was the worst of all the plagues. They announced total war and destruction on the Bolshevik and Soviet partisans and upon all Jews. A Jew who fell into the hands of the White Poles never lived to tell about it …
>
> The White Poles were very well armed. Their ammunition came by plane from abroad [sic]. Behind them were the English in London. … All the Poles were on their side and among the Byelorussians (White Russians) there were farmers who prefarred [sic] Poles to Russians.[277]
>
> In June of 1943, fourteen thousand Polish officers were found slain in the forests of Katyn, near Smolensk. They were soldiers—trained officers—captured by the Russians in 1939, isolated in camps. In June of 1941, they were recaptured in the German Blitz offensive. All of them had been shot in the back of the head, their hands bound with wire, and German arms and bullets were found in their graves and bodies. So reported the International Red Cross.[278]

Even more analytical Holocaust scholarship does not depart markedly from the accepted schema. American sociologist Nechama Tec, for example, repeats the standard cliché that Polish partisans in this area received orders to wage war on Soviet and Jewish partisans. Specifically, she lays blame on a group of officers, some of whom were allegedly Fascists, sent by the Polish government in exile "with instructions to undermine and contain the Soviet power in this area," for "disturb[ing] the existing Polish-Russian equilibrium." She alleges, without offering proof, that Polish partisans roamed the countryside attacking

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[275] Based on a Yad Vashem deposition cited in Allan Levine, *Fugitives of the Forest: The Heroic Story of Jewish Resistance and Survival during the Second World War* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1998), 191.

[276] Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 142. Sulia Wolozhinski Rubin from Nowogródek was a member of Bielski's group.

[277] Account of Zussya Dolsky, a member of the "Organi Keyser" company, in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 447.

[278] Yehuda Adelman, *Heroes Without Medals* (New York: Vantage Press, 1983), viii. The author, a native of Horodek and member of the Soviet partisans, was employed by Smersh as a counter-intelligence officer.

Jews: "White Poles were using Jews as shooting targets."[279] These charges have found their way into works of non-Jewish historians who rely on Jewish sources uncritically, with scant, if any, regard for Polish and Soviet sources.[280]

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[279] Tec, *Defiance,* 151–53; Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 182–83. Tec is correct, however, when she writes that what particularly irked the Soviet underground was the arrival of emissaries and trained professional officers (paratroopers) sent by the Home Army High Command. See Krajewski, *Uderzeniowe Bataliony Kadrowe 1942–1944,* 381–83. These contacts were, for the Soviets, a sign of the lack of subordination of the Polish partisans, and this they could not tolerate. But it was merely a pretext, and Polish actions had little to do with disturbing the Soviet-Polish "equilibrium," which the Soviets never intended to respect in any event, since the course of those relations was already cast. See Gnatowski, "Kontrowersje i konflikty między ZWZ–AK i radzieckim podziemiem na północno-wschodnich ziemiach Polski w latach 1941–1944," in Liedke, Sadowska and Tyrkowski, *Granice i pogranicza,* vol. 2, 188–89; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 151, 155 n.240. Notwithstanding, seemingly friendly relations between the Polish and Soviet partisans continued. The latter were invited to the Polish Independence Day celebrations in Derewno (Derewna) on Novermber 11, 1943, with which they were visibly displeased. See Poland, Home Army, *The Unseen and Silent,* 152; Polskie Siły Zbrojne, Armia Krajowa, *Drogi cichociemnych,* 142. However, it was the publication in the bulletin of the Home Army district command of information about the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers in Katyn, which had resulted in the breaking of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the Polish government in London, that particularly incensed the Soviet partisan command when a copy of the bulletin fell into its hands. See Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 126. Additionally, there was a history of conflict stemming from the continuous plundering of local villages by Soviet partisans, which resulted in interventions by Polish units from time to time. For a summary of some of these activities see Bohdan Urbankowski, "Antysowieckie powstania: Polska," in *Encyklopedia "Białych Plam",* vol. 1, 227. According to Soviet sources, some Soviet partisans (intruders) were killed by Polish partisans. See Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 139.

[280] Both American historian Martin Dean and German historian Bernhard Chiari, for example, appear to accept Tec's interpretation in their rather superficial treatment of the topic which scarcely acknowledges Polish sources. See Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 143–44; Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front,* 283–84. Belorussian historians still generally adhere to the traditional Soviet point of view but attempt to put a Belorussian spin on the Soviet partisan movement in that area. See Viktor I. Ermolovich and Sergei V. Zhumar, *Ognem i mechom: Khronika polskogo natsionalisticheskogo podpolia v Belorussii (1939–1953 gg.)* (Minsk: Belorusskii nauchno-issledovatelskii tsentr dokumentovedeniia, arkheografii i arkhivnogo dela, 1994), 33; Ivan P. Kren', "Der Einsatz der Armia Krajowa auf dem Territorium Weißrusslands aud weißrussischer Sicht: Versuch einer Ortsbestimmung," in Chiari, *Die polnische Heimatarmee*: 585–98. See also the rebuttal by Sigizmund P. Borodin (Zygmunt Boradyn), "Die weißrussische Geschichtsschreibung und Publizistik und die Heimatarmee in den nordöstlichen Gebieten der Republik Polen 1939 bis 1945," in ibid. (Chiari), 599–616; and the overviews by Kazimierz Krajewski, "Der Bezirk Nowogródek der Heimatarmee: Nationalitätenkonflikte und polnische Verhältnisse 1939–1945," in ibid. (Chiari), 563–84 and by Piotr Niwiński, "Die nationale Frage im Wilnagebiet," in ibid. (Chiari), 617–34. Recently Russian nationalist historians have revived the old Soviet stereotypes with a vengeance depicting the Polish underground as a negligible anti-German force that somehow managed to murder more Soviets and Belorussians than the Nazis. See, for example, Elena Viktorovna Iakovleva, *Polsha protiv SSSR 1939–1950* (Moscow: Izdatelskii dom "Veche", 2007), especially 195–96. A minority of liberal Russian historians reject these primitive views. See, for example, Boris Sokolov, *Okkupatsiia: Prawdy i mify* (Moscow: Izd. Ast-Press Kniga, 2002).

This interpretation simply overlooks a mass of crucial evidence to the contrary and treats Soviet wartime policies with respect to the Poles as being "neutral," or even "defensive."[281] Indeed, it is surprising that such views, which are premised on the "benign intentions" of the authors of the Gulag and Katyn, are still being put forward by historians (and others), to the detriment of the Poles, long after Stalin's sinister ways have been amply exposed. As British historian Norman Davies argues compellingly,

> One has to remember that the Soviet Union under Stalin had adopted a stance of extreme, formalized hostility towards everything outside its borders or beyond its control. Unless instructed otherwise, all Soviet organizations routinely treated all foreigners, including pro-Communist sympathizers, as suspects or enemies. They routinely arrested and eliminated any Soviet citizens, including prisoners of war, who had been abroad without permission or had been in unauthorized contact with non-Soviet persons. In this state of affairs, which was well known to the USSR's neighbours, there was no possibility whatsoever that the Polish Underground could have reached a modus vivendi with the Soviet Army of its own accord.[282]

Remarkably, two decades after the release of Soviet archival documents that clearly show that on June 22, 1943, General Ponomarenko ordered the subversion of the Polish underground, followed by the August 24, 1943 assault on Burzyński's partisan unit, which, according to Fedor Markov's field report, resulted in the execution of the Polish delegation and some 80 Polish partisans, Israeli historian Sara Bender, relying exclusively on Jewish testimonies, continues to propagate the concocted—and thoroughly discredited—Stalinist narrative that blames the Polish victims for their own fate by instigating the conflict. (Bender advances the bogus claim that the Poles were planning a hostile operation against the Soviet partisan headquarters, something that would have been in violation of the instructions of the Home Army headquarters not to enter into a conflict with the Soviet partisans, whereas Markov's attack on the Polish unit was entirely consistent with earlier instructions of the Soviet partisan command to eliminate the Polish partisans.) Bender does, however, confirm the participation of the Jewish "Revenge" detachment (*Nekama* in Hebrew, *Mest'* in Russian) in the assault on Burzyński's detachment.

> In September 1943 fighters of the Neqama Battalion took part in an organized operation against the "White Poles." Markov decided to undertake the operation after learning that the AK (Armia

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[281] This interpretation conveniently ignores salient facts such as the following: the Polish government in exile, and consequently the Home Army High Command, continued to advocate cooperation with the Soviet partisans and Polish partisan units repeatedly attempted to come to an agreement with the Soviet partisans operating in the Wilno and Nowogródek regions; the Soviet leadership had issued directives already in January 1943 aimed at the destruction of any independent Polish underground movement; the Soviet partisans carried out treacherous massacres of the Polish underground in Naliboki in May 1943 and Burzyński's partisan unit in Narocz forest in August 1943 (neither of which Tec and like-minded authors care to mention); finally, Soviet partisans conducted incessant and brutal "economic" operations against the civilian population. Moreover, Tec's position falsely assumes that the Soviets were prepared to share power in this area, but as Zygmunt Boradyn argues compellingly in his study *Niemen–rzeka niezgody*, which is based largely on Soviet archival documents, they were not. The charge, found in Soviet reports from this time, that the Polish underground was planning an assault on the Soviet partisans is patently false. See, for example, Markov's report dated October 15, 1943, in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1943),* 57.

[282] Davies, *Rising '44,* 626.

> Krajowa—Army of the Homeland, the underground in occupied Poland) forces, with which he had signed a cooperation agreement, were in contact with the Polish government-in-exile in London and were planning a hostile operation against the headquarters of the Belarusian brigade. Markov invited the AK staff to a meeting at his headquarters, and meanwhile summoned partisan fighters of the units under his command, including Jewish fighters of the [Jewish] Neqama Battalion. Upon arrival at the headquarters, the AK men were disarmed and returned to their base accompanied by Soviet commanders. The AK base was surrounded, and as Markov's partisans burst into it they apprehended the AK men and executed 15 of the command staff.[283]

As Bender goes on to demonstrate, the now defunct Soviet (Stalinist) narrative about the Polish underground converges with the Jewish nationalist narrative:

> The majority of Polish fighters were attached to Russian platoons, but over time they escaped and formed platoons of their own, which fought against the Russian partisans, murdered Jewish partisans and collaborated with the Germans.[284]

The longevity and prevalence of this ethno-nationalist narrative in Jewish historiography is truly remarkable. A backgrounder to the *Jewish Partisans in Belarus 1941–1944* database states:

> Jews face extreme dangers from the Polish partisan detachments that operated in Western Belarus. The Polish home army (AK and NSZ) were militant nationalists and anti Semites—assaults beatings, robberies and murders of Jews were common.[285]

Unfortunately, Jewish historiography has been unable to come to terms with the harsh reality of the close association of Jews with the Soviet partisans who declared war on the Polish underground. (This pro-Soviet legacy continues in Israel to this day. According to Russian sources, in July 2017 Israel's Knesset adopted a declaration—put forward by the Russians—condemning Poland's new law on Soviet war monuments.) The most moderate and informed position is found in the recent writings of Israeli historian Yitzhak Arad. In *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union* (2009), Arad's treatment is still rather muddled, as he conflates the earlier conflict between the Soviet and Polish partisans with the later operation "Burza." Arad writes:

> Following the discovery of the murder of thousands of Polish officers in Katyn—for which the Germans accused the Soviet Union (an accusation which later turned out to be true)—diplomatic

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[283] Sara Bender, "Life Stories as Testament and Memorial: The Short Life of the Neqama Battalion, an Independent Jewish Partisan Unit Operating During the Second World War in the Narocz Forest, Belarus," *East European Jewish Affairs,* vol. 42, no. 1 (April 2012): 1–24, at p. 10.

[284] Ibid., 20 n.54.

[285] *Jewish Partisans in Belarus 1941–1944*, Introduction by Jenni Buch, Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/holocaust/0218_Belarus_partisans.html>. As pointed out earlier, there were no NSZ forces in this area, but historical accuracy is not a strong point of the Jewish narrative.

> relation were severed between the Polish government-in-exile and the Soviet Union. With the approach of the Soviet army to the pre-September 1939 Polish borders, the Polish government-in-exile decided to take control of the areas of former eastern Poland. This operation was coined "Buzha" [Burza] (storm) and caused incessant clashes between the AK and Soviet partisans in the forests and rural areas of west Belorussia.[286]

Arad's 2010 study *In the Shadow of the Red Banner*[287] represents a significant improvement on the sorry state of Jewish historiography regarding the conflict between Soviet and Polish partisans. He recognizes, implicitly at least at one point, that in the struggle between the Soviet and Polish partisans, Jews fell primarily as combatants on the side of the Soviets, and not as victims of anti-Semitism:

> Soviet partisans and the AK fought one another, and neither avoided murdering civilians suspected of supporting the other side. As part of the Soviet partisans, the Jewish partisans participated in clashes with the AK and also sustained losses in the battles.[288]

Arad is the first Jewish historian who makes a serious effort, albeit belatedly, to consider *some* of the Polish historical writings on this subject that refer to recently released Soviet archival documents on the genesis of the conflict. (Arad has not actually done research in those archives himself.) However, this study exhibits serious shortcomings, such as omissions of important events and selective treatment of certain issues, in addition to its somewhat incoherent presentation of how the conflict between the Soviets and Polish "nationalists" unfolded.

Arad misses two opportunities to point out that it was the Soviet Union that unilaterally severed diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile in the wake of the exposure of the Katyn massacre in April 1943. Arad does cite the circular issued by the Central Committee of the Belorussian Communist Party on June 22, 1943, which instructed the Soviet partisan leadership in the field "to use every measure possible against 'the bourgeois-nationalist Polish units and groups.'"[289] However, he indicates that the Soviet partisan leadership (Chernyshev) waited patiently until December 1, 1943 to act on those orders, after some Jewish partisans who were robbing villagers in Dubniki faced aggression from Polish partisans. (There is more about the Dubniki incident later on.) Arad thus overlooks pivotal events that transpired in Narocz forest already on August 26, 1943, when Markov "disarmed" Burzyński's partisan unit, killing 80 partisans in the process, in which the Jewish "Revenge" (*Mest*) detachment took part. Nor does he acknowledge the actual extent of the casualties of the December 1, 1943 assault, which took the lives of

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[286] Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,* 591, n.6.

[287] Yitzhak Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner: Soviet Jews in the War against Nazi Germany* (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen, in association with Yad Vashem, The International Institute for Holocaust Reseach, 2010).

[288] Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 291. Arad gives a different perspective, however, at pp. 193 and 342.

[289] Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 303. These documents were published in Polish in 1994 and in English in 1998.

about 50 Polish partisans. Such omissions are inexcusable, whether for a historian or for a former partisan who served under Markov (as Arad did). While noting two attacks on Jewish marauders,[290] Arad avoids mentioning "problematic" events like the massacre of some 130 Poles in Naliboki on May 8, 1943 and the massacre of some 40 Poles in the village of Koniuchy on January 29, 1944. The former involved some Jewish partisan from Naliboki forest, whereas the latter was perpetrated in large part by Jewish partisans from Rudniki forest. In short, we are presented with a Jewish nationalist perspective with a decidedly pro-Soviet bias.

American historian Joshua Zimmerman's treatment of the Polish-Jewish relations in northeastern Poland in his 2015 study *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945*[291] is particularly problematic, at times shoddy. It should be acknowledged, however, that Zimmerman's study—albeit uneven—represents a marked improvement over the usual Jewish narrative presented by nationalist historians such as Reuben Ainsztein and Shmuel Krakowski,[292] and is more in keeping with Michael Borwicz's repudiation—as "distorted generalizations"—of accusations of the Home Army being anti-Semitic and significantly prone to killing Jews.[293] Some parts of Zimmerman's book, such as the presence of Jews in Home Army units and the assistance provided to Jews by the Home Army and its individual members (the Hanaczów rescue story stands out), will be indeed eye-opening for English-speaking readers. Generally, Zimmerman strives to take a nuanced approach with regard to a number of contentious matters. Notably, he discards an often-repeated claim that has become a staple of Holocaust historiography, namely, that General Tadeusz Komorowski ("Bór"), the commander of the Home Army, issued an order (which Jewish sources misidentify) instructing Home Army members to liquidate Jewish partisans and forest groups. Citing historians Stanislaus Blejwas and John Lowell Armstrong, Zimmerman acknowledges that Order 116 of September 15, 1943 on banditry did no such thing; in fact, it did not even mention Jews. (There is more on Order 116 in Part Three of this study.) Unfortunately, as we shall see, Zimmerman revives this claim in relation to the Nowogródek District

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[290] Arad, In *the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 291.

[291] Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). A revised Polish edition of this book appeared in 2018 under the title *Polskie Państwo Podziemne i Żydzi w czasie II wojny światowej* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018). For more of the same treatment see Joshua D. Zimmerman, "The Polish Underground Home Army (AK) and the Jews: What Postwar Jewish Testimonies and Wartime Documents Reveal), *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures,* vol. 34, no. 1 (February 2020): 194–220. While labeling parts of Zimmerman's scholarship as "shoddy" may seem harsh, it is certainly more respectful that his outright dismissal of important scholarship on the spurious ground that its authors are "nationalist" historians. This matter is addressed in a subsequent footnote.

[292] Zimmerman notes the "negative portrayal of the Home Army among professional Jewish historians," which "was made semi-official with the appearance in the early 1980s of *The War of the Doomed: Jewish Armed Resistance in Poland, 1942–1944* by the Israeli historian and Holocaust survivor, Shmuel Krakowski." See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 6.

[293] Michael Borwicz, "Factors Influencing the Relations Between the General Polish Underground and the Jewish Underground," in Meir Grubsztein, ed., *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Conference on the Manifestations of Jewish Resistance, Jerusalem, April 7–11, 1968* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1971), 360–61. Michał Borwicz (Maksymilian Boruchowicz) became a member of the Home Army in the Miechów area after being smuggled out of the Lwów ghetto by his Polish Socialist friends in the Żegota organization.

of the Home Army. He also fails to take into account the *modus operandi* of the Soviet partisan command (detailed a little later on) and that of the Polish Communist underground in assessing the actions of the Polish underground and the appropriateness of its response.[294]

Although Zimmerman canvases a large body of archival documents and incorporates much new information not found in the one-sided English-language literature on this topic, one of the main shortcomings of his book is the selective use of sources. This, in turn, leads Zimmerman to overlook or ignore important facts and events that undermine his findings and conclusions. While decrying Polish "nationalist" historians whose respective expertise is greater than his own, and using that pretext to dismiss

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[294] One would look in vain to find information about the subversive strategy employed by the Communist underground throughout occupied Poland, like the following resolutions adopted at a meeting of Communist underground leaders held in Siedlce in August of 1943:

> (1) Involve eminent representatives of the Polish intelligentsia to cooperate, or provoke them to take a clear position on communism and the PPR [i.e., the Communist Polish Workers' Party]. In the event of a negative attitude or refusal to do so, eliminate them on your own or by means of denunciation.
> (2) Penetrate Polish independence organizations to a greater extent than to date in order to find people in leadership positions that should be immediately eliminated by denouncing [them] to the G[estapo] or by our own enforcement bodies.
> (3) Enhance sabotage activities of a blatant demonstration and provocation nature under the guise of Polish independence organizations to cause an increase in repression on the part of the Germans and the elimination of Polish fascist organizations with their help.

See Bechta, *Rewolucja, mit, bandytyzm,* 117–18.

their important scholarship,[295] Zimmerman assures his readers that he is undertaking a "comprehensive re-examination" of the topic of relations between the Polish underground and the Jews and that "[c]ritical to this study is an *absolute commitment* to strive for impartiality, including the careful and critical evaluation of *all* sources."[296] Clearly, the author does not live up to this stated commitment. This is especially evident in Chapter 10 of his book, ominously titled "When the Home Army Turned Its Guns on the Jews," which

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[295] Of the four major Polish scholars on the Home Army and Soviet partisans in this area, Zimmerman refers to the publications of Zygmunt Boradyn and Kazimierz Krajewski very selectively, and not at all to the important scholarship of Jarosław Wołkonowski and Bogdan Musiał. Other important historians Zimmerman ignores include Marek Wierzbicki, Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Piotr Gontarczyk, Tadeusz Piotrowski, and Alexander Brakel. Zimmerman's uncritical acceptance of Joanna Michlic's categorization of Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, Bogdan (misspelled by Zimmerman) Musiał, Tomasz Strzembosz, and Marek Wierzbicki as "nationalist" historians is particularly disquieting, as it then leads to the exclusion of their valuable scholarship. (This is a deliberate ploy on the part of Joanna Michlic and like-minded authors to stigmatize historians without having to deal with the merits of their scholarship. In Michlic's worldview, only Poles can be nationalists, never Jews, as the latter can only be victims without any agency. It has also become fashionable for Western scholars to rail against alleged Polish nationalists, but they never identify this as a problem on the other side. It is precisely this attitude that stifles open and honest historical debate.) See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 7 n.31. The scholars Zimmerman ignores are acknowledged experts in their fields. Israel historian Yehuda Bauer regards Musiał's book *Sowjetische Partisanen: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* as "a most important contribution" to the history of the war, the Soviet partisans, and Polish-Jewish partisan relations in Belorussia. Reviewed in *Yad Vashem Studies* (vol. 38, no. 2, 2010): 195–204. Wierzbicki's articles have been published in the journal *Polin* and in the collective volume *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), edited by Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon. Chodakiewicz does not fit this "nationalist" mould as his views are best described as classical or even paleoconservative, and he is quite critical of ethnonationalism. Chodakiewicz's monograph, *The Massacre in Jedwabne, July 10, 1941: Before, During, and After* (Boulder, Colorado: East European Monographs; and New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), is cited and relied on by a leading German Holocaust historian: Peter Longerich, *Holocaust: The Nazi Persecution and Murder of the Jews* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 196, 594. The real reason for this branding is to avoid having to deal with the inconvenient arguments and facts these historians raise. This is apparent from Zimmerman's own glaring omissions—ones that are addressed by the historians he deliberately ignores. Joanna Michlic herself espouses a Jewish ethnonationalist agenda, and Zimmerman even exposes her own pronounced bias on an important matter. Michlic's take on General Rowecki's radiogram of September 5, 1941 is rather typical of her highly subjective methodology of sniffing out alleged anti-Semites at every possible turn (Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 103–104):

> Joanna Michlic maintained that the document was proof of Rowecki's negative views toward the Jews. "The language of the report," she wrote, "reflects the emotive distance of its author toward the subject he describes. There is a glaring lack of reference to the Jews as members of the same society as Polish citizens; Jews are simply presented as 'they,' not 'us'." The radiogram was thus proof of Rowecki's "anti-Jewish prejudices." Jan T. Gross derived an entirely different interpretation. "Rowecki," Gross wrote regarding the above-cited radiogram, "was not a politician, he did not speak on behalf of a party program, and he did not advocate an ideological point. He was a well-respected, unprejudiced, moderate, very well informed, dedicated public servant advising his government on a matter of public interest. And it was his best judgment that the government should stay away from anything that could be construed as advocacy on behalf of the Jews." Rowecki, Gross concluded, "was by no stretch of the imagination an anti-Semite." The basis for Gross's claim was a personal one. His mother, Halina Szumańska Gross, was a member of the Home Army's Burueau [*sic*] of Information and Propaganda during the war and had known Rowecki personally. She, along with others who knew him, told Gross that Rowecki had never demonstrated any anti-Jewish tendencies.

Among the historians Zimmerman likes to cite is Šarūnas Liekis, who is no expert in this area and whose writings display a pronounced anti-Polish bias. Liekis attempts to equate the Home Army with murderous Lithuanian Nazi collaborators and the Soviet partisans. Liekis and Michlic are prime representatives of a school of historians who thrive on making crude generalizations about Poles, without any consideration of the behaviour and attitudes of Lithuanians or Jews toward Poles. Rather than expose alleged Polish "nationalism," which is their goal, they underscore their own nationalistic proclivities.

[296] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 7, 10 (emphasis added). This unfortunate shortcoming is characteristic of the school of historians, centred around the Polish Centre for Holocaust Research (Centrum Badań nad Zagładą), which Zimmerman champions.

deals with conditions in northeastern Poland. One does not need to rely on Polish sources to see that his treatment of the Home Army is fundamentally flawed; Soviet and Jewish sources provide ample evidence of that. Remarkably, Zimmerman ignores Soviet sources and uses Jewish sources selectively. Contrary to what Zimmerman states, Home Army directives and reports did not target Jews as such, but referred to Soviet-Jewish bands—an apt description for the Soviet underground in this area.

Dwelling on minutiae, subjective impressions and anecdotal sources, for example, his overreliance on

Abraham Melezin's problematic testimony, while ignoring sources that do not bear out Melezin's claims,[297] and disregarding credible evidence from Soviet archives and Polish sources, Zimmerman manages to avoid important facts that undermine his thesis that the Home Army in the Nowogródek District (whose story is inextricably linked to events in the adjacent Wilno District), driven by an anti-Soviet agenda and anti-

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[297] Abraham Melezin's testimony is woven into Zimmerman's narrative, and at times overtakes the narrative to its detriment, in an attempt to bolster his argument that anti-Semitism and anti-Communism were the driving forces behind the behaviour of the Polish underground in the Nowogródek region. Allegedly, Poles were incapable of distinguishing between Soviets, Communists and Jews, so they struck at all of them in equal measure. At the same time, Zimmerman reduces Soviet blame for the conflict with the Polish underground to practically nothing. As an apologist for the Soviets, Melezin diqualifies himself as an objective witness. According to Melezin, the Soviets just wanted the Poles' "cooperation" in defeating the Germans. They were pushed into taking action against the Home Army because the local leaders, who were stridently anti-Communist and anti-Semitic, "started to fight with Soviet partisans" and also struck at Jews. Not surprisingly, all Polish officers "later paid dearly" for the behaviour of these mavericks. (See Melezin, "My Memoirs"—Zapole, 29.) Although ostensibly a "loyal" member of the Home Army, Melezin is unaware of any hostilities on the part of the Soviet partisans directed at the Home Army, the civilian population, or even Jewish fugitives hiding in the forests. The other villain Melezin perceives is ubiquitous Polish anti-Semitism. Almost all the Poles Melezin encountered were allegedly "highly anti-Semitic."

Abraham Melezin, who went by the name of Adam Melżyński during his stint with the Home Army in the Nowogródek District, is not mentioned in any of the many publications on the Home Army, nor is his superior, Captain Eustachy Chrzanowski, who was the director of the Regional Military Court in Lida in the interwar period. They were not significant players. There is a record of an Adam Melżynski, born in Warsaw on October 5, 1908, being apprehended in Zapole near Lida on an unspecified date, and transferred by the Sipo in Białystok to the Stutthof concentration camp, where he was prisoner 32209 from February 28, 1944. See Straty osobowe i ofiary represji (Baza strat), Institute of National Remembrance, Internet: <http://www.straty.pl>. As it turns out, Melezin's much cited testimony is a strange and unreliable amalgam of things he allegedly experienced and things that occurred only *after* he left the area, with major problems of chronology. In his massive typescript, "My Memoirs" (archived at the YIVO Institute in New York City, RG 1872, Papers of Abraham Melezin, Box 6), Melezin displays an uncanny ability to recall events in the minutest detail, but oddly provides no deatils relating to his primary assignment: "the task of processing all incoming Home Army members" in the western Lida area. Passages from Melezin's extensive reconstructed dialogues are set out by Zimmerman as if they were authentic. In addition to his memoir, Melezin also recorded oral testimony for the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (Interview code 3382), which Zimmerman cites sporadically. One of the major problems with Melezin's testimony, and Zimmerman's reliance on it, is Melezin's recollection of his dealings with Lieutenant Adolf Pilch (code name "Góra"). Melezin alleges Pilch came to Zapole to meet with him and Chrzanowski met in February 1943 (Zimmerman adjusts the date of the meeting to the spring of 1943, but this does not help him), and that they debriefed Pilch on local conditions. Melezin also claims that, despite his lowly rank, he felt compelled to lecture Pilch when Pilch stated that his first and foremost "duty is to fight the *Żydokumuna* [Judeo-Communism]." See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 282. In all likelihood, Melezin never met Pilch. Pilch did not arrive in the Nowogródek area until *the latter part of August* 1943, around the time Melezin was arrested by the Germans. According to Melezin's memoir, his arrest came on the heels of a raid on the Belorussian police station in Zapole, and there is no mention of a meeting with Pilch around that time period. According to Polish sources, this raid was carried out by the Home Army on the night and early morning hours of August 29–30, 1943. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 239 (a German gendarme and the Belorussian commander were killed). Melezin displays no real knowlewdge of this operation, which took place in the locality where he resided. Pilch's activities are well documented. He was parachuted into Poland from England on February 17, 1943, as part of the Polish special forces. He underwent conspiratorial training in Warsaw and was not assigned to the Nowogródek District until July 1943. Before leaving on his mission, Pilch met in Warsaw with Second Lieutenant Stanisław Sędziak (code name "Warta"), the chief of staff of the Nowogródek District, at the end of July 1943. Pilch did not leave Warsaw until the latter part of August 1943. On his way to his post in Naliboki forest, Pilch made a stopover in Lida, where he again met up with Sędziak, as had been planned, and Second Lieutenant Aleksander Warakomski ("Świr"), the commander of the Stołpce subdistrict. Pilch then proceeded to Baranowicze, where he stayed for a few days. He arrived in Naliboki forest on September 6, 1943 and assumed command of the Stołpce Battalion on an interim basis, until the arrival of Major Wacław Pełka at the beginning of November 1943. See Adolf Pilch, *Partyzanci trzech puszcz* (Kraków: Mireki, 2013), 73, 79, 82; Marian Podgóreczny, *"Góra", "Dolina"—partyzant niepokonany: Wywiad rzeka z cichociemnym Adolfem Pilchem: Wspomnienia cichociemnego* (Warsaw: Askon, 2014); Marian Podgóreczny, *Zgrupowanie Stołpecko-Nalibockie Armii Krajowej: Oszczerstwa i fakty: Wywiad z dowódcą Zgrupowania, cichociemnym, mjr Adolfem Pilchem ps. "Góra", "Dolina",* Internet: <http://www.iwieniec.eu/AK/ZSN_AK-fakty.pdf>. There is no reason to believe that Pilch paid a surprise visit to Zapole to meet with persons of low rank like Melezin and Chrzanowski, at the end of February 1943, as Melezin alleges, or in the spring of that year, a timeframe arbitrarily chosen by Zimmerman, or afterwards in order to get briefed on matters (conditions in the Stołpce area) outside their area of operation that the two had no firsthand knowledge about. The problems with chronology only

Jewish animus, unilaterally targeted Soviet and Jewish partisans as well as Jews who escaped from the ghettos and hid in the forests. While conceding that, at some unspecified point in 1943, the Soviets "changed their policy on relations with the Home Army partisans in Western Belarus from toleration and cooperation to confrontation,"[298] Zimmerman's exclusive focus and barometer for that development is the unilateral hostility of the Polish partisans that allegedly provoked the Soviet response. Zimmerman makes no mention of any of the following key events that shed a completely different light on this story: the massacre of some 130 Polish civilians in Naliboki on May 8, 1943, in which Jewish partisans also took part; General Ponomarenko's instructions of June 22, 1943 to eliminate Polish partisans operating in this area[299] (instead Zimmerman shifts the blame for the deteriorating relations and initiation of open hostilities between the Soviet and Polish partisans onto the Polish underground); the unprovoked slaughter of eighty of Burzyński's partisans near Lake Narocz (in the Wilno District) on August 24, 1943, in which Jewish partisans participated as members of both mixed Soviet detachments and the Jewish *Nekama* unit (a fact acknowledged by Israeli historian Sara Bender[300]); General Ponomarenko's permission, given on November 14, 1943, to disarm "Miłaszewski's" partisans and the true extent of the "disarming" operation on December 1, 1943 (Zimmerman cites a Jewish participant who alleges there were no casualties among the

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[298] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 275.

[299] General Ponomarenko's circular to the district Communist party committees in the field read:

> In those regions that are under the influence of our partisan units and party centres do not allow activities of Polish groups formed by the reactionary nationalist circles [i.e., the Home Army]. The leaders are to be eliminated in a manner that is not noticeable. The [Polish] units are to be disbanded and their arms depots are to be appropriated or, if it is possible, take those units under your secure influence. Use them by directing them to active combat against the Germans. Regroup and break them up in an appropriate way. You should do away with their significance [as] independent military units and attach them to large [Soviet] units, after which you are to carry out quietly an appropriate cleansing of hostile elements.

See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 41–42; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 243.

[300] Sara Bender, "Life Stories as Testament and Memorial: The Short Life of the Neqama Battalion, an Independent Jewish Partisan Unit Operating During the Second World War in the Narocz Forest, Belarus," *East European Jewish Affairs,* vol. 42, no. 1 (April 2012): 1–24. Soviet archival documents describing this massacre were published already in the mid-1990s so there is no excuse for not knowing them. Peter Smuszkowicz, a Jewish partisan whose testimony is cited in this study, recalled the attack and its inevitable consequence as follows: "There were many Jewish boys in the Markov Brigade. … At this time the Jews and Polish partisans were still friendly. … The leaders of a unit of Polish partisans of the AK (Army-Krojowa) [sic] Land Army had been arrested by Soviet partisans on orders from Moscow. … Their partisans had been separated and assigned to several Soviet detachments. They kept their weapons, but their commanders were arrested and though some may have escaped the rest were shot. … At the first chance they got, the Polish partisans deserted the Soviet brigades and reformed their own AK units. They were now our enemies." See Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 253.

Polish partisans,[301] while ignoring Soviet instructions to eliminate resisters as well as Soviet and Polish reports describing the killing of Polish partisans found in Zygmunt Boradyn's *Niemen—rzeka niezgody,* which Zimmerman lists in his bibliography). Other shortcomings include the failure to recognize the very real conflation of Soviet and Jewish partisans in this area (the Soviet partisan movement did not tolerate the existence of independent partisan units and also disarmed and dispersed its only Jewish unit, *Nekama*; moreover, Soviet partisans killed hundreds of Jewish fugitives); the failure to acknowledge the extent of banditry and violence directed against the civilian population by Soviet partisans, among them Jews (although described in many Jewish testimonies, Zimmerman manages to overlook this widespread phenomenon and cites those sources only for alleged Polish hostilities against Jews without providing any

[301] According to Zimmerman: "Without a single shot, the Polish partisans were disarmed and taken as prisoners. According to Greenstein, none were physically harmed. While the rank-and-file either merged with the Soviets (by force) or got away, the officers were taken away." See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 276. General Ponomarenko's report to Stalin, based on a report filed by General Dubov on December 4, 1943, referred to the "disarming" of 230 partisans and stated that, in the town of Derewno, "a group of Poles put up armed resistance, and as a result 10 Poles were killed and 8 wounded." Subsequently, the Soviet partisans embarked on a widescale "cleansing" operation directed at family members and supporters of the Home Army in the area. Polish partisans that had been absorbed into their units were murdered surreptitiously. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 163–64, 301–302. The actual unfolding of events is detailed in this study.

context for them, as in the case of Nacza forest[302]); the cursory dismissal of the rapacious foraging of Soviet and Jewish partisans as a "necessity" without considering its impact on the victimized population; the unwarranted reduction of assaults on Soviet and Jewish partisans, who are mentioned in tandem in Home Army reports, to anti-Semitic attacks on Jews as Jews.[303]

These important omissions and shortcomings are ample reason to discredit Zimmerman's treatment of this topic. Clearly, tthey undermine his thesis that Polish anti-Communism and anti-Semitism, rather than Soviet aggression, were the reason for Soviet-Polish hostility. German historian Alexander Brakel displays a more profound grasp of the underlying cause of the conflict in the following analysis:

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[302] Zimmerman claims that the mere presence of Jewish fugitives in forests where Soviet partisans were stationed created the Home Army's (false) perception of Jews as hostile Soviet elements and led to lethal mideeds on the part of the Home Army directed against Jews. Allegedly, the Home Army lashed out at Jews and Soviets without distinction, and without any discernible cause. See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 271, 274, 298. The "supporting" Home Army documents Zimmerman cites selectively actually identify the reasons for the conflict, namely, the increasingly aggressive behaviour of the Soviet partisans and the incessant and ruthless pillaging of the civilian population. Zimmerman neglects to mention that, and fails to carry out an objective analysis of local conditions. See Krajewski, *Nowogródzki Okręg AK w dokumentach,* 202, 203, 267–68, 397. (Zimmerman also ignores Krajewski's expert commentaries on the text passages Zimmerman cites, e.g., pp. 188 n.44, 200 n.83.) Essentially, Zimmerman overlooks the behaviour of Soviet partisans and Jewish forest groups, which finds confirmation in Jewish testimonies as well, and thus whitewashes it. Zimmerman cites the example of Nacza (Nacha) forest near Lida, which was subjected to a intensive German raid in June or July 1943. Relying on Abraham Melezin's testimony, Zimmerman states that Jewish partisans were prevented from escaping from the forest because Polish partisans allegedly cut off the exits. See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 274–75. Jewish sources, canvassed earlier, do not allude to that. After the destruction of the Jewish family camp, the Jews that remained in the Nacza forest formed part of the Lenin Komsomol Brigade of the Soviet partisans. Their activities consisted primarily of raiding villages for supplies. These raids were often accompanied by threats and violence. Melezin himself mentions that local peasants complained about "Jewish bandits" who "raid villages at night and requisition food at gunpoint" (see Melezin, *My Memoirs*—Zapole, 60), but Zimmerman neglects to mention that. Leon Kahn, who hails from that area, provides the following description of the largely Jewish Lenin Komsomol: "It wasn't long before they established a reputation as thieves, drunks, and rapists in the farm country surrounding the forest. They were a thoroughly reprehensible group …" See Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 88. The Home Army was compelled to respond to calls by the victimized villagers for protection and tried to deter plunderers, especially those caught in the act. The testimonies of the Jewish members of that detachment speak for themselves:

> Here there was no problem of obtaining food, which was plentiful, nor did we lack clothing. When on a mission, we would take off our ragged and dirty clothes and change them for others at the homes of farmers.
>
> Among us Jews there were also those who behaved like wolves; those wild men took from the villagers more food than was allowed. They also took clothing and other objects which were not necessary for our people. In those cases, our commander [Stankevich] had to draw this especially to my attention, demanding that I not permit such behaviour. For such behaviour he once put those greedy Jews to account; they were Pesach Manes, Zelman Mednicki and Berl Miler. Thanks to my intervention they were let off, but their weapons were taken from them.
>
> The days when we would load a horse and wagon with provisions to be taken to the ancient forest were over. Not because of the possible danger from the Germans but because of the White Poles, who were lying in wait for us … Now, on returning to the forest, we packed a knapsack bursting at the seams with food supplies, bearing it on our backs together with the weapon each of us held in his hand. In addition to individual knapsacks, there were also heavier kitbags, which we took turns to carry.

See Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 208; Testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/555; Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 270. The foregoing is but a small but representative selection.

[303] See, for example, Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 280–81, where General Komorowski's Organizational Report No. 240, which refers to "self-defense in the face of hostile Soviet partisans and Jewish-communist bands," is reduced to "hostility toward Jews" and "attacks … on Jewish partisans."

> After the German defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk, when it became clear that Soviet victory was only a matter of time, Soviet partisan officials lost interest in further cooperation and stopped negotiations [with the Home Army]. They now regarded their main duty as the cleansing of the occupied territories of 'hostile elements'. With the Red Army dealing effectively with the Germans, the main opponent was now the Polish underground; in November 1943 Chernyshev ordered the disarming of the Polish units [in Nowogródek District]. This was the beginning of guerrilla warfare between two underground movements.[304]

Since Zimmerman's sympathies clearly lie with the Jewish and Soviet partisans (about whom he expresses little, if any, criticism), he is untroubled by the murder of Polish partisans and civilians and is unable to appreciate the compelling and legitimate need for self-defence on the part of the Poles. Instead, he accuses the Home Army of initiating the conflict by unilaterally attacking and murdering Jews and Soviet partisans. To bolster his argument Zimmerman *advances by two months* the well-documented Home Army reprisal against a group of marauding Jewish partisans in Dubniki on November 17, 1943, claiming that this "precipitating" event took place a mere eleven days after Lieutenant Adolf Pilch took command of the Stołpce Battalion on September 6, 1943 and allegedly instructed his men to attack Soviet and Jewish partisans.[305] In fact, Lieutenant Pilch disapproved of that reprisal, calling it "an unfortunate incident" (*przykry wypadek*) and agreed to convening a joint Soviet-Polish committee to investigate the incident. Moreover, in the early part of October 1943, well before the incident in Dubniki, Jewish partisans from the Stalin Brigade and Chkalov Brigade were already actively hunting down members of the Polish underground in that area.[306] Zimmerman then refers to a report from September 26, 1943, in which Pilch states that his unit limited its activities, for the time being, to protecting the population from pillaging by Soviet partisans and Jewish bands.[307] Yet he fails to mention that Kazimierz Krajewski, the scholar who compiled these documents, points out that Pilch's report is inaccurate and describes a number of Polish altercations with German forces during that month.[308] Another distortion is Zimmerman's treatment of

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[304]Alexander Brakel, "The Relationship between Soviet Partisans and the Civilian Population in Belorussia under German Occupation, 1941–4," in Shepherd and Pattinson, *War in a Twilight World,* 92

[305] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 275.

[306] Walczak, *13. Brygada Armii Krajowej Okręgu Wileńskiego,* 54–55.

[307] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 276.

[308] Krajewski, *Nowogródzki Okręg AK w dokumentach,* 266 n.5. See also Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 153 n.231 for details of Home Army assaults on German positions in the fall of 1943.

Abraham Melezin's account of a conversation with a local Home Army field commander regarding how the Home Army would deal with Jewish fugitives.[309]

Zimmerman concludes his treatment of this topic with the following skewed assessment: "attacks of the Nowogródek District Home Army subdistrict commanders on Jewish partisans were sanctioned not only by the Nowogródek District Home Army commander, Col. Szlaski [Lieutenant-Colonel Janusz Szlaski

[309] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 282. Zimmerman omits the initial part of the commander's response: "Jews are not our problem, Germans have their policies toward them and let them deal with them the way they understand." Thus, the final statement, "we do not help our enemies to solve their problems," was a reference to not helping the Germans in carrying out their anti-Jewish policies.

("Prawdzic")], but also by Gen. Komorowski himself."[310] To buttress his argument, Zimmerman cites Abraham Melezin, who refers to Col. Szlaski as an "extreme antisemite who did nothing to curb anti-

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[310] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 281. Other variations of this charge—repeated *ad nauseam*—can be found throughout Zimmerman's book:

> the Home Army commander [i.e., General Komorowski] ordered two units in Nowogródek to attack "Soviet-Jewish bands" whom he believed to be fighting alongside Soviet partisans" (p. 7)
>
> Lt. Adolf Pilch, commander of the First Battalion of the 77th Home Army Infantry Regiment in Nowogródek. In his postwar memoirs, Lt. Pilch openly acknowledged that he did not accept Jews into his partisan unit. The reason, he maintained, was due to the alleged pro-Soviet orientation of the Jews in the region. Missing from his account, however, is the fact that Lt. Pilch ordered his men to attack Jewish partisans (a point we shall discuss later). Testimonies of Jewish partisans suggest that Lt. Pilch's case was the rule rather than the exception in the Nowogródek District Home Army. (p. 259)
>
> The emphasis of the new Home Army commander—Gen. Komorowski—on combating banditry in the second half of 1943 was interpreted by some district and subdistrict commanders as permission to attack Jewish partisans. (p. 267)
>
> There is also evidence that Gen. Komorowski sanctioned the use of Piasecki's and Pilch's units to strike at Jewish partisans. In Gen. Komorowski's Organizational Report No. 240 covering the period September 1, 1943–February 29, 1944, he wrote the following comments on the Nowogródek District Home Army: "The highest priority in the Nowogródek district is the display of self-defense in the face of hostile Soviet partisans and Jewish-communist bands." Komorowski continued that "to achieve this goal our units have been mobilized and grouped into three battalions: in the 77th Infantry Regiment—the Zaniemeński and Cadre Strike Battalion—and in the 78th Infantry Regiment—the Stołpce Battalion." The same groups, the report continued, had crossed over to the left bank of the Niemen River "and as a result the regions of Lida, Szczuczyn, Wołożyn and other parts of Nowogródek have been cleared of Soviet bands." The report concluded that Polish partisans were being subjected to frequent Soviet assaults. But he acknowledged that the attacks were partly "in retaliation for the liquidation by our division of a Jewish band [of 12?] people who had robbed Polish people." This document clearly suggests that attacks of the Nowogródek District Home Army subdistrict commanders on Jewish partisans were sanctioned not only by the Nowogródek District Home Army commander, Col. Szlaski, but also by Gen. Komorowski himself. (pp. 280–81)
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> The records demonstrate that the commanders of the Białystok District Home Army, Col. Władysław Liniarski, and of the Nowogródek District Home Army, Col. Janusz Szlaski, ordered their soldiers to murder Jewish partisans and civilians hiding in the forests. (p. 297)
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> In the second half of 1943, a stark difference within the Polish Underground emerged along geographic lines with regard to the Jews. It was during this time, as demonstrated in Chapter 10, that the Home Army district commanders of Nowogródek and Białystok instructed their officers to "liquidate" Jewish partisans. (p. 299)
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> As the tide of the war turned inexorably in favor of the Soviets, and it became clear that liberation would come from the east, the Home Army in northeastern Poland increasingly identified local Jews as hostile, pro-Soviet elements. This led to several cases of local Home Army commanders waging battles against Jewish partisans who were desperately trying to survive in the forests but who were being defined as "Bolshevik-Jewish bands. (p. 416)
>
> [Komorowski] approved battling Jewish partisans in the eastern borderlands whom he regarded as pro-Soviet. This abrupt policy reversal resulted in the death and injury of numerous Jewish partisans in the Nowogródek, Białystok, and Vilna districts. (p. 418)

The charges leveled against Lieutenant-Colonel Władysław Liniarski ("Mścisław"), the commander of the Białystok District Home Army, are also skewed. As shown by his order of July 30, 1943, cited on p. 268, Liniarski did not target escaped Soviet POWs or Jews as such, but rather Communist-Jewish groups involved in banditry (*bandy komunistyczno-żydowskie*), as well as Polish collaborators ("spies and informers") and those that threatened the security of the Home Army. That Communist and Jewish bands were involved in banditry that often took on violent forms is beyond question, as Jewish accounts cited in Part 3 of this study amply confirm. Moreover, in practice, the victims of

Jewish actions among his soldiers."[311] Miriam Perewoska, a Jewish woman from Wilno, refutes the charge that Col. Szlaski was an anti-Semite. Perewoska recalled that, when she was hiding with her daughter in a village near Lida, Col. Szlaski "always tried to give me the best possible conditions and he did what he could for me."[312] Furthermore, General Komorowski never issued instructions to strike at Jews as such, nor at Soviet partisans for that matter, and Zimmerman is hard-pressed to identify such an order. (In fact, as Zimmerman himself acknowledges, the Home Army High Command reprimanded local commanders who entered into ceasefires with the Germans while under attack from the Soviet partisans.) Since there were no autonomous Jewish partisan units operating in the area by the summer of 1943, local Home Army reports did not single out Jews, but rather referred to the activities of both Soviet and Jewish groups. As Jewish testimonies acknowledge, Jewish partisans participated in assaults on Polish partisans, and Jewish partisans as well as members of Jewish family camps attached to the Soviet partisans carried out numerous, often violent, supply-gathering expeditions. This matter had already been raised by General Stefan Rowecki, General Komorowski's predecessor, in a report from March 15, 1943, which referred to "assaults by Soviet-Jewish bands" in the Wilno province.[313] General Rowecki's attitude would doubtless have only hardened in the face of subsequent Soviet massacres of Polish partisans. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that General Komorowski reversed the Home Army's longstanding instructions not to engage in combat with Soviet partisans. As mentioned earlier, General Komorowski instructed his partisans to cooperate with the Soviet forces, to welcome them as "allies of allies," and to stress their partnership in the common fight against Nazi Germany. However, to these instructions he added—entirely understandably and reasonably—that Polish partisans have a right to defend themselves if attacked. General Komorowski's Order 1300/III, issued on November 20, 1943, states:

> All our war preparations are aimed at armed action against the Germans. In no circumstances can they result in armed action against the [Soviets] who are entering our territories in hot pursuit of the

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[311] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 271. In his Shoah Foundation interview, Melezin does not qualify "antisemite" with "extreme"—this is Zimmerman's embellishment.

[312] "'She was like an angel, not of this world': The Story of Irena Zadarnowska," January 2019, Polish Righteous, POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Internet: <https://sprawiedliwi.org.pl/en/stories-of-rescue/she-was-angel-not-world-story-irena-zadarnowska>.

[313] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 189. Zimmerman mentions this report in Chapter 7, but does not acknowledge it in his discussion in Chapter 10, nor does he reconcile that report with the claim that the sole culprit was alleged Polish anti-Semitism. An example of a murder in the Wilno District of a member of the Polish underground and his family, as well as one of the Jews he was sheltering, is that of Tadeusz Korsak, who was abducted by the Chkalov Brigade in September 1943 after being betrayed by a Polish Jew who had deserted from the Polish partisans to the Soviets. This incident is described in more detail in the text.

> Germans … The exception is in essential acts of self-defence, which is the right of every human being.[314]

It is important to remember that this order was issued *after* Warsaw had received credible reports of Soviet attacks on Polish partisans and civilians, and well after the massacre by Soviet and Jewish partisans of eighty Polish partisans near Lake Narocz on August 24, 1943. Thus, belatedly, General Komorowski authorized acts of self-defence in response to the open hostilities initiated by the Soviet underground. Organizational Report 240 (for the period September 1, 1943 to February 29, 1944), which Zimmerman cites, merely acknowledged the reality that, in the Nowogródek District, "the main task became self-defence in the face of the hostile Soviet partisan movement and Jewish-Communist bands." This was by no means an order to "liquidate" Jewish or Soviet partisans as such. As late as July 1944, General Komorowski explicitly stated that "combat with the Soviets is an unwelcome last resort, with respect to both regular and partisan Soviet units."[315] Furthermore, it was only in the face of the life-and-death struggle for their very existence that the Polish partisans in this area that local commanders were compelled to strike back at the Soviet partisans. To interpret this as a unilateral declaration of war by the Home Army against Jewish and Soviet partisans is simply perverse. As Zimmerman himself notes, Komorowski continued to express strong disapproval of attacks on Jews and Soviet partisans in other contexts (that is, non-self-defence) well after that period, as late as June 1944,[316] even though the Communist underground staged increasingly hostile attacks on the Home Army like the massacre by the People's Army, on May 4, 1944, of

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[314] Komisja Historyczna Polskiego Sztabu Głównego w Londynie, *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w drugiej wojnie światowej,* vol. 3: Armia Krajowa, 209–210, as cited in Davies, Rising '44, 206–207. The attempts to paint the Nowogródek local commander Lieutenant Adolf Pilch ("Góra") and General Komorowski as anti-Semites flies in the face of their demonstrated positive attitude toward Jews in other contexts. When Pilch evacuated his partisans from the Nowogródek region to the Kampinos forest near Warsaw, in September 1944 he took into his ranks a group of Hungarian Jews who had escaped from a German labour force. It was under Komorowski's leadership of the Home Army that the underground resolved, in September 1943, to pursue and punish blackmailers of Jews. In September 1944, Komorowski personally decorated two Jewish People's Army (*Armia Ludowa*) officers—Jan Szelubski, the commander of a unit with many Jewish members, and Edwin Rozłubirski, the deputy commander of a battalion—with the Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari for their valour during the Warsaw Uprising. See Engelking and Libionka, *Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie,* 147 n.281, 29, 150–51 (respectively). Stefan Korboński and Henryk Woliński, two high-ranking members of the Polish undeground decorated by Yad Vashem, both dismissed the charges of Komorowski's alleged anti-Semitism, as did Lidia Ciołkosz, the Jewish wife of of the Polish Socialist leader, Adam Ciołkosz. See Lukas, *The Forgotten Holocaust,* 78–79, 241 n.61. There is no actual evidence that Komorowski was involved in any anti-Semitic activities or even that he harboured any anti-Jewish animus. Thus, the case against Komorowski, and his alleged departure from General Rowecki's "neutral to sympathetic attitude toward the Jews" in favour of hostility, seems to be contrived. Zimmerman's criticism of Komorowski is also rather muddled in another important respect. On the one hand, Zimmerman faults Komorowski for his "extreme anti-Soviet and anti-Communist views, which he attributes to his "nationalist orientation" (pp. 250–51); on the other hand, Zimmerman later in effect concedes that Komorowski's fear of Stalin's intentions was well founded. For the record, history proved Komorowski to be correct in his assessment.

[315] Janusz Marszalec, "Polskie Państwo Podziemne wobec komunistów polskich 1939–1944," in Tomasz Chinciński, ed., *Przemoc i dzień powszedni w okupowanej Polsce* (Gdańsk: Muzeum II Wojny Światowej; Oskar, 2011), 418. Marszalec cites General Komorowski's report number 243, dated July 14, 1944, reproduced in volume 3 of *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945*.

[316] Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 372.

some twenty members of a Home Army unit in Owczarnia near Opole Lubelskie.[317] Zimmerman's views, it must be noted, are strikingly at odds with historian Yisrael Gutman's astute assessment of the reality of local conditions:

> One should not close one's eyes to the fact that Home Army units in the Wilno area were fighting against the Soviet partisans for the liberation of Poland. And that is why the Jews who found themselves on the opposing side perished at the hands of Home Army soldiers—as enemies of Poland, and not as Jews.[318]

For Zimmerman, however, everything is reduced to one single overriding factor: Polish anti-Semitism. In his relentless pursuit of any traces of anti-Semitism, Zimmerman fails to notice the bigger picture. Contrary to his assertion, there is no room for context, dynamics and the unique local conditions that prevailed in northeastern Poland. Although Zimmerman compares northeastern Poland unfavourably with southwestern Poland (Eastern Galicia), attributing this to alleged heightened anti-Semitism in the Wilno area,[319] he neglects to take into account the entirely different conditions that prevailed in the Lwów area, notably the lack of Soviet partisans with whom Jews could align themselves and a common enemy, namely, hostile Ukrainian nationalist partisans. Moreover, Jews in northeastern Poland had experienced Polish statehood for less than twenty years and, apart from a small number of assimilated Jews (far fewer than in southwestern Poland where the Polish language had official status under Austrian rule prior World War I), overwhelmingly regarded themselves exclusively as Jews, and not as Poles. Most of them did not identify with the Polish state and its destruction was a matter of indifference to them, as they demonstrated in September 1939 when the Soviet Union invaded Easter Poland, and afterwards. Although not Communists, their leanings were pro-Soviet rather than pro-Polish. They gravitated toward the Soviets mostly for pragmatic reasons: the Soviet partisan movement was a stronger and better equipped than the Polish underground; the Soviet Union was a formidable power; and there was a strong likelihood that the area would again come under Soviet control. Since the Soviet partisans had little support among the local population, whether Polish or Belorussian, they took in all armed men, including many Jews, who came their way. Zimmerman's treatment of other important matters, especially his selective use of documents, is

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[317] Gontarczyk, *Polska Partia Robotnicza,* 336–37. Some sources give the date of the massacre in Owczarnia as May 4, 1944. See Rafał Drabik, "Mord pod Owczarnią i Stafanówką," *Kombatant,* no. 11–12 (nos. 216–216, November–December 2008): 6–8.

[318] Israel Gutman, "Uczmy się być razem," *Znak* (Kraków), June 2000: 66.

[319] Zimmerman does not reconcile this claim of heightened anti-Semitism in the Wilno area with reports he cites earlier on that attest to the opposite. See Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945,* 101.

equally problematic.[320] Can such writing be taken as serious scholarship that meets Zimmerman's own self-imposed lofty standards? There are just too many problems with Zimmerman's book to treat it as authoritative.

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[320] The following are some additional examples of the shortcomings of Zimmerman's book (apart from frequent typographical errors). Given Zimmerman's treatment of these various sources and documents, can we have any confidence in his treatment of other sources and documents without verifying their content and the context?
(1) With regard to the January 1934 German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact, Zimmerman neglects to mention that Poland had earlier signed a similar pact with the Soviet Union in 1932, and renewed that pact in May 1934. The purpose of Piłsudski's pact with Germany was not to legitimize Hitler's ascent to power, as Zimmerman suggests (p. 14), but to legitimize Poland's contested boundaries and to prevent an invasion of Poland by Germany. It was thus a counterpoint to the non-aggression treaty with the USSR. As Timothy Snyder points out, "This initiative was timely. Piłsudski had tried (and failed) to arouse interest in Europe for a preemptive action against Hitler. … In January 1934, Berlin and Warsaw signed a declaration of nonaggression, agreeing that their common border would not be changed by force. For Polish leaders in 1933 and 1934, facing the rise of both Hitler and Stalin, preserving the status quo was an end in itself." See Timothy Snyder, *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning* (New York: Tom Duggan Books, 2015), 55–56.
(2) Zimmerman's claim that the National Party (Endek) "*pioneered* a new method of political agitation: the anti-Jewish economic boycott" (pp. 23–24) is baseless. Economic boycotts employed to strengthen one's own group's economic position relative to other groups had been in existence in other countries since the 19th century, for example, against the Chinese by the White population in the United States, against the English in Ireland, and against the Germans and Jews by Czechs in Bohemia and Moravia. On the last of these, see See Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 17. Jews also engaged in such practices at various times.
(3) Zimmerman cites the diary of Chaim Kaplan rather selectively (p. 39). He mentions the September 3, 1939 entry that describes the elation of the Poles at the news of England and France's declaration of war on Germany, but fails to mention the earlier entry of September 1, 1939, where Kaplan writes disparagingly of Poland and the Poles: "This war will indeed bring destruction upon human civilization. But this is a civilization which merits annihilation and destruction. … now the Poles themselves will receive our revenge through the hands of our cruel enemy. … Each side accuses the other of every abominable act in the world. Each side considers itself to be righteous and the other murderous, destructive, and bent on plunder. This time, as an exception to the general rule, both speak the truth. Verily it is so—both sides are murderers, destroyers, and plunderers, ready to commit any abomination in the world." See Abraham I. Katsh, ed., *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan* (New York: Macmillan; and London: Collier-Macmillan, 1965), 19–21. Kaplan also peppers his wartime diary with anti-Christian remarks directed at the Poles. Ibid., 47, 133.
(4) While noting that over 100 resistance organizations to oppose German rule had come into being in the German-occupied zone in the first months of the occupation (p. 47), Zimmerman fails to mention that there were no Jewish organizations among them and to draw appropriate conclusions as to the level of support among Jews for Polish statehood. Similarly, in the Soviet zone, attempts by the Polish conspiratorial organization in Wilno (*Związek Walki Zbrojnej*—Union for Armed Struggle), in the second half of 1940, to reach a cooperative agreement with Jewish underground groups were fruitless because of the latter's lack of interest in anti-Soviet agitation. See Rafał Wnuk, "The Polish Underground under Soviet Occupation, 1939–1941," in Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon, eds., *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 105. Given this state of affairs, it is not surprising that the Polish underground's main focus was ethnic Poles, as they were not only the country's largest and core group, but also created and manned the underground resistance structures that fought to restore Polish statehood both under both the German and Soviet occupation. The national minorities—Ukrainians, Belorussians, Germans, and Lithuanians—gravitated toward their own ethnic structures, which were in opposition to the Polish state, while most Jews preferred not to be engaged in a struggle they did not regard as their own.
(5) Zimmerman claims that Home Army commander Stefan Rowecki reported, on November 15, 1940, that "the underground forces of the National Party … were battling against [sic] the ZWZ-ZWZ-Home Army in some districts" (p. 81). In fact, the report in question, which is actually dated November 21, 1940, does not refer to armed clashes, but rather to political rivalry. See Tadeusz Pełczyński, Halina Czarnocka, Józef Garliński, Kazimierz Iranek-Osmecki, and Włodzimierz Otocki, eds., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 1: *Wrzesień 1939–czerwiec 1941* (London: Studium Polski Podziemnej, 1970), 338–45, at pp. 342 and 343.
(6) Zimmerman ignores the extensive credible evidence of Jewish collaboration in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland in 1939–1941 described in important studies by Marek Wierzbicki, Ben-Cion Pinchuk, Dov Levin, Krzysztof Jasiewicz, and other historians. These sources attest to frequent assaults on Polish soldiers, armed revolts, the spontaneous creation of Red militias and revolutionary committees in virtually every town, the apprehension of Polish officials and handing them over to the Soviet authorities, widespread denunciations, etc. Zimmerman imputes anti-Semitism to Polish underground reports that refer to this well-documented collaboration. He also purges a key passage from a report

7. Jewish Partisans Join in Soviet Operations Against Polish Partisans

What was the role of Jewish partisans in these pivotal actions? The truth of the matter is that Jews in the Soviet partisan movement collaborated in the planned destruction of the Home Army. Indeed, a compelling argument could be made that it was the Jewish partisans who first declared war on the Polish partisans.

There is no question that Jewish partisans took part in unprovoked, murderous attacks on Polish partisans, at a time when there the latter were not involved in hostlities directed against either the Soviets or the Jews. The following rather laconic description of the "disarming" of Burzyński's unit near Lake Narocz in August 1943 was penned by Shalom Yoran (then Selim Sznycer), a member of "Revenge" or "Vengeance" (*Mest'* in Russian, *Nekama* in Hebrew), a partisan unit composed exclusively of Jews within the Vorshilov Brigade commanded by Markov.[321]

> Brigade Commander Markov decided to rid the area of the AK [Armia Krajowa] menace. Our entire brigade was moved to the region close to the AK bases. We surrounded and attacked them. After three days of fighting, the entire area was free of the AK. Many of them were killed, many were taken prisoner, and the rest ran away to the areas close to Vilna [Wilno], where another AK brigade was located.[322]

Other Jewish partisans, however, attempt to justify their participation in Markov's attack on the Polish partisans by advancing bogus claims that the Home Army were Nazi collaborators and incorrigible "Jew killers." These partisans are oblivious to the repercussions of these assaults for Polish-Jewish relations, preferring instead to skew the evidence and lay all the blame on the Poles. The following account by Alexander or Shura Bogen (Katzenbogen), a member of the Jewish "Revenge" detachment, is characteristic of that sentiment.

> One morning, a messenger arrived from the brigade headquarters with an order: The division of *Nekama* [Hebrew for "Revenge"] had to get ready for a mission. All the fighters had to go with a weapon to a forest thicket a few kilometers away, taking position in a frontal line and then waiting for orders. Nobody knew exactly what the orders would be. We lay between the tall pine trees and waited impatiently for instructions. We knew something important was to occur. We could see from all sides of us that many Russian divisions came and held position. Messengers ran from one place to another to transfer orders from the headquarters of the brigade. We lay there with our weapons

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[321] The Jewish "Nekama" detachment was shortlived. It was formed and the beginning of August 1943 and disbanded by the Soviet command towards the end of September, 1943, with its members being stripped of their weapons, valuables, and even boots. Left to their own devices, over half of its 250 members perished in the German blockade of the Soviet partisans in Narocz forest launched on September 24, 1943. See Sara Bender, "Life Stories as Testament and Memorial: The Short Life of the Neqama Battalion, an Independent Jewish Partisan Unit Operating During the Second World War in the Narocz Forest, Belarus," *East European Jewish Affairs,* vol. 42, no. 1 (April 2012): 1–24; Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 280–82.

[322] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 173–74. Yoran claims that Markov's assault on the Home Army was precipitated by the latter's attacks on Soviet partisans while "on their way to missions," but neglects to point out that these all-too-frequent "missions" were so-called economic operations, i.e., robbing farmers. He also claims, without citing any proof, that the Home Army was "systematically searching out Jews hiding in the villages and forests in their areas of operation." Ibid., 173.

drawn toward an opening in the forest and waited for the order to open fire, but no order came. All of a sudden, we saw a large camp of partisans walking toward the direction of the clearing. We were very surprised to see that all of these people were without weapons—they looked devastated and downcast, walking in groups of four. I lay down with my drawn weapon and examined the rows of advancing people. Externally, they looked like any other partisans. I could not figure out what had happened.

All of a sudden, one of them looked at me. Our eyes met, and I yelled, "Jank [Janek], what is happening here?" I had studied with Jank in high school. He was the only Polish kid in the Jewish-Polish gymnasium in Vilna [Wilno]. He was a good-looking guy, tall and splendidly built, very friendly and liked by everyone. Now he was walking here among the lines of Polish partisans without weapons. They were POWs being taken to their deaths! I could not exchange any words with him, and he disappeared as if it had all been a dream. I could not imagine that Jank, who was so good-hearted, could belong to a group of anti-Semites who killed Jews. They were the *Armia Krajowa* (AK). Only a short time passed before we heard shots from the directions of the clearing. Then a deathly quiet descended.

… the headquarters of the Soviet partisan movement in Belarus and Lithuania received orders from Moscow to get rid of the AK. Colonel Markov, the head of the Voroshilov Brigade, had sent an order to all divisions in the Naroch [Narocz] Forest to get rid of the Polish brigade that still had some ties with Russian partisans. On this day, all the fighters that belonged to the Polish brigade were ordered to come, without weapons, to this clearing in the forest and meet their Russian comrades. When the Polish brigade arrived, the Soviets put fifteen of the commanders in a line and, after they [the Soviets] read what [the commanders] were guilty of, which was resistance to the Soviet rulers, they were killed on the spot.

Only the leaders were killed. Most of the Polish fighters were added to different Soviet regiments. As time passed, they escaped and organized their own unit. They started fighting the Russian partisans and killing Jews, collaborating with the SS. After the punishment, I saw hundreds of Polish resistance soldiers returning from this execution that took place in the clearing. They appeared very shaken; I looked for Jank, my classmate, but could not find him among the returnees.[323]

Another Jewish partisan, Peter Smuszkowicz, is much more straighforward. He signals the direct and foreseeable consequences of that assault on relations between the Soviet and Polish partisans: relations that had been favourable up to that time turned hostile overnight.

During the summer of 1943, Yacov and I were members of a Soviet partisan brigade named after its commander Ponnomarenko [sic]. A large group of partisan detachments, including the Markov Brigade [actually the Voroshilov Brigade led by Markov—*M.P.*] were assembled in the forest. The Markov Brigade was a strong force and had steady contact with Moscow, both through radio connections and airplane (Kukuruznik) drops. Nearby was a Polish partisan base known as Kmicic

[323] Alexander (Shura) Bogen, originally Katzenbogen, "The Onset of the Partisan Units in the Forest of Naroch," in Moshe Kalcheim, ed., *With Proud Bearing, 1939–1945: Chapters in the History of Jewish Fighting in the Naroch Forests* (Tel Aviv: Organization of Partisans, Underground Fighters, and Ghetto Rebels in Israel, 1991), Internet: <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Svencionys/naroch_partisans.html>.

> [i.e., Burzyński's unit]. One of their officers was Porucrnik [porucznik, i.e., lieutenant] Mruckowski [Wincenty Mroczkowski]. At this time there was an atmosphere of cooperation between the Russian and Polish partisans as they fought their common enemy, the Germans.
>
> There were many Jewish boys in the Markov Brigade. … At this time the Jews and Polish partisans were still friendly. …
>
> We were curious as to the reason for the sudden assembly of so many partisan groups. We heard rumours that we were preparing an attack on the German garrison in Miadziel [Miadzioł]. We lay in ambush position and within a few hours shots could be heard nearby. We soon discovered what had happened. The leaders of a unit of Polish partisans of the AK (Army-Krojowa) [sic] Land Army had been arrested by Soviet partisans on orders from Moscow. Some of them [in fact just one—*M.P.*] had taken their own lives. Their partisans had been separated and assigned to several Soviet detachments. They kept their weapons, but their commanders were arrested and though some may have escaped the rest were shot.
>
> At the first chance they got, the Polish partisans deserted the Soviet brigades and reformed their own AK units. They were now our enemies.[324]

Elsewhere in that same book, the activities and loyalties of Jewish partisans, many of whom were prewar citizens of Poland, are not hidden:

> Our commander [i.e., of the Spartak Brigade] ordered Polish partisans to be disarmed and we were told to keep them out of our forest.[325]

> Belorussia had by that time close to 200,000 partisans. Many of the fighters were Jews as were many of the commanders, particularly in eastern Belorussia. Most of them felt that Russia was their Motherland. We laid down the red carpet for the Red Army.[326]

More typically, however, Jewish partisans simply gloss over the assault on Burzyński's unit all together, as evidenced by the following account of Boris Green (then Greniman), an "organizer" of the "Revenge" unit.

> When we reached the Markof [Markov] Otriad, at that time, he did not accept Jews … Markof was willing to accept me, as he needed a radio technician, however he refused to admit my brother. … I did my partisan work with devotion and dedication. … I remained with the Markof's Otriad till the end of the war. …
>
> We grew to become a significant force. … We were not alone in the forest, from time to time we encountered groups of the Armia Krajowa the Polish partisans that as a rule were collaborating with

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[324] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 253.

[325] Ibid., 211.

[326] Ibid., 215.

> the Germans in killing Jews and Jewish partisans. We had a confrontation with them and a loss of life.[327]

Even memoirs of academics like as Noah Shneidman, who acknowledges some wrongdoing on the part of the Soviet partisan leadership, misrepresent the sequence of crucial events, level unsubstantiated charges against the Home Army, and invariably take the side of their Soviet "protectors."

> Just a few weeks prior to the disbandment of *Mest* ["Revenge"], the Belorussian Soviet partisan leadership disarmed and disbanded a detachment of the so-called A.K. (Armia Krajowa), or the Polish Home Army. The A.K. regarded the Polish government in exile, in London, England, as its superior and it opposed both Nazi occupation and Soviet rule. Most A.K. members were highly anti-Semitic, and many Soviet partisans, as well as Jews hiding in the forests, were killed by them. None the less, the A.K. unit, which operated in the Narocz region, had good relations and cooperated with the Voroshilov brigade partisans. Being afraid, however, of treachery Soviet partisan leaders abused the trust of the Poles, lured them cunningly into a trap, and killed their leaders.[328]

Remarkably, the ideologically tinged memoirs of Yitzhak Arad, a historian at the Yad Vashem institute, who belonged to a partisan unit based in Narocz forest which was part of the Voroshilov Brigade, do not do not even mention the "disarming" of Burzyński's unit.

David Plotnik, who served in the Chkalov unit and then in the Kalinin division of the Komsomol Brigade, describes various assaults on Polish partisans including the "disarming" of Miłaszewski's unit in December 1943:

> I took part … in the attack on a Polish company under the command of Miloshewski [sic, Miłaszewski]. …

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[327] Account of Boris Green (Greniman), in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 1 (1984), 538–39. Greniman is not the only one to display amnesia about key triggering events. There is no mention of the treacherous disarming and massacre of Burzyński's unit anywhere in Isaac Kowalski's four-volume anthology containing more than 2,500 pages. Greniman does recall, however, an assault carried out by his unit on the small town of Kobylnik, near Lake Narocz. Most of the houses were burned to the ground because their owners had allegedly seized abandoned Jewish property. Ibid., 541; Sara Bender, "Life Stories as Testament and Memorial: The Short Life of the Neqama Battalion, an Independent Jewish Partisan Unit Operating During the Second World War in the Narocz Forest, Belarus," *East European Jewish Affairs,* vol. 42, no. 1 (April 2012): 1–24, at p. 9. Other sources do not corroborate Greniman's claim of being an organizer of the "Revenge" unit. See Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 450.

[328] N. [Noah] N. Shneidman, *Jerusalem of Lithuania: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Vilnius—A Personal Perspective* (Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press, 1998), 113. Shneidman estimates that there were "well over 300" Jewish partisans in the Voroshilov brigade and thus made up at least one-fifth of its numerical strength. Ibid., 111. Historian Yitzhak Arad estimates that some 700–760 Jews fought in Soviet partisan formations in Koziany and Narocz forests, and that if the fallen are added, the number of Jewish partisans in the Wilejka region was between 950 and 1,100. See Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 283.

> We also carried out a punitive mission against the German-inspired self-defense organization of the peasants in the villages of Zagorie [Zagórze?] district, Bohudki and Zalesie.[329]

The Shchors detachment of the Gastello Brigade, in which many Jews served, was also enlisted for similar actions against the "White Poles" and their supporters.[330]

How about those Jewish partisans who were merely "aligned" with the Soviets such as the Bielski unit? According to Jewish sources,

> In the late fall of 1943, Russian headquarters in the Nalibocka [Naliboki] forest ordered a surprise attack on the Kościuszko group [of the Stołpce battalion, which included Miłaszewski's unit]. Several otriads were asked to contribute fighters. The Bielski unit sent fifty men.
>
> At dawn the Poles were surrounded and without a single shot were taken prisoner.[331]

> [Jacob Greenstein:] We went out, 200 of us, I was part of the group. We surrounded them at night and in the early hours of the morning, without one shot, we took them prisoners. There were about 400 of them. Only 50 or so of their cavalry men were missing. They were in a nearby town, Iwieniec. When they heard what had happened they united with the Germans and fought against us. …
>
> When we took these Poles prisoners, the soldiers among them we divided into small groups and sent each group into a different Russian unit. Many of them had come from the surrounding villages and towns. Soon most of them ran away. The rest stayed with us and fought against the Germans. With the officers we dealt differently. … I was present when they were being interrogated. We could get nothing out of them. … I have heard later that some of them were sent to Moscow. I don't know what happened to them there. … I know that when we disarmed them and when we took them prisoners we did not kill them.[332]

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[329] Nachum Boneh, ed., *Pinsk sefer edut ve-zikaron le-kehilat Pinsk-Karlin,* 3 volumes (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Pinsk-Karlin in Israel, 1966–1977); translated into English as *History of the Jews of Pinsk* (Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Pinsk/Pinsk.html>), Part Two, Chapter 5 ("In the Various Partisan Units").

[330] A. Chackiewicz, "O rozbrojeniu formacji AK w Nalibockiej i Naroczańskiej puszczach w latach 1943–1944," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 84, 87. Unit 51 of the Shchors detachment was reported to have about 100 armed Jewish members under the command of Lieutenant Iakov Fedorovich, a Jew from Homel, who "always had in mind the reawakening of Jewish consciousness" among the recruits and even spoke with them in Yiddish. See Nachum Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry: The Story of the Jews of Slonim During the Holocaust* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 238–39. A Jewish member reports that in the "large partisan detachment, 'Shchors,' made up of 1,000 people, there was a Jewish group comprising 130 Jews." See the testimony of Mendel Szczupak, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/49.

[331] Tec, *Defiance,* 153. Confirmation of the participation of Jewish partisans in attacks on Polish partisans is also found in Polish sources. See Banasikowski, *Na zew Ziemi Wileńskiej,* 357–58.

[332] Testimony of Jacob Greenstein regarding the disarming of Miłaszewski's unit, in Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 183. See also Tec, *Defiance,* 115.

As we can see, these self-serving, sanitized accounts are rife with inaccuracies and misrepresentations. The authors suffer from amnesia about the fate of the Poles they helped to "disarm." Yechiel Silber, a member of the Bielski group, suffers from the opposite syndrome: exaggeration coupled with invention. The latter is calculated to justify the former.

> A command was immediately issued from Moscow to remove the weapons from the Poles. A few partisan Otriads organized themselves, and went out to the Poles to remove their weapons.
>
> A plebiscite was conducted in the morning: who wishes to remain with the partisans and who wants to go home. All had to register. The camp had several thousand people, and only a few dozen chose to remain.
>
> Those of the Poles who registered to remain as partisans were grouped into one Otriad told us that that they had a directive to murder all Jewish and Russian partisans. Their headquarters was located in England, under the leadership of Nikolajczyk [i.e., Stanisław Mikołajczyk, Poland's then exiled Prime Minister]. The camp which was supposed to remain free was free to go to the other world …[333]

The final statement is doubtless a euphemism indicating that they killed off the Polish partisans. Needless to add, the alleged "directive to murder all Jewish and Russian partisans" is sheer invention.

Oswald Rufeisen, a Jew who was sheltered by Polish nuns in Mir after leaving his post with the German authorities and before joining the Ponomarenko otriad, tells a markedly different story. Rufeisen denies that Polish partisans were hunting down Jews and takes exception to the standard Jewish version of these events.

> When I entered the forest [in December 1943] the Polish partisans were being liquidated, disarmed, subdivided, and placed into different units. I don't know if the purpose was to finish them off or simply to subordinate them to the Soviets. Perhaps only later on someone gave an order to liquidate them. After they were dispersed they could not have become Russian enemies because they were disarmed. The few I had met in our unit were shot in the back, in an underhanded way. This happened when they were supposedly being transferred to another place. Someone who sat behind them shot them, one by one. … This was not decent. I think that it was part of a conscious effort to

[333] Yechiel Silber, "The Partisans of Sochaczew," in A. Sh. Sztejn (Shtayn, Stein) and Gavriel Wejszman (Vaysman, Weissman), eds., *Pinkas Sokhatshev* (Jerusalem: Former Residents of Sochaczew in Israel, 1962), 514 ff.; translasted as *Memorial Book of Sochaczew,* Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/sochaczew/sochaczew.html>. After the arrival of the Soviet army, Silber became a member of the militia in Wilno and later Kaunas, before leaving for Warsaw in 1945.

> liquidate the Polish underground. … This was a dirty job of the Soviets, the same way as Katyn was or the Polish uprising in Warsaw.[334]

Jewish sources claim that the discord between the Polish and Soviet-Jewish partisans stemmed from anti-Soviet agitation by the Polish partisans. More specifically, they point to an assault, on November 18, 1943, by a squadron from Miłaszewski's partisan detachment on a group of Jews from Zorin's partisan unit

[334] Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 183–84. In an interview published in 1993 Oswald Rufeisen stated: "I spent the war in Eastern Poland where I joined the German police pretending to be a Pole. I did not see Poles there murdering Jews, although I did see Poles being murdered. Moreover, I saw Belorussians, Latvians, Estonians, and Ukrainians who murdered [Jews], but I did not see Polish units doing that. But that isn't publicized [in Israel]. That's the way it was and let them not tell me otherwise, I know how it was. I know why Poland was chosen [by the Germans as the place where the Jews were to be killed]. Not because it was anti-Semitic. The Polish nation was second in line. There was no one to witness these events: there was no Papal nuncio, no ambassadors, no observers from outside. … And it was easiest there because in Poland there lived 3½ million Jews. One didn't have to transport them from somewhere else. Nor was it necessary to take the Poles into account, three million of whom also perished after all." See "Jako chrześcijanin, a nawet jako Żyd," *Polityka* (Warszawa), May 29, 1993.

caught pillaging in the villages of Dubniki and Sobkowszczyzna.[335] Plundering of villages by various factions had been a major problem in this region since the spring of 1943. As Soviet sources acknowledge, the problem intensified considerably in October and November 1943, especially with the arrival of large numbers of Soviet partisans from the Minsk ghetto in Eastern Belorussia. In response to such activities, the leader of the Frunze Brigade issued a warning that anyone caught robbing in Soviet partisan territory would

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[335] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka `na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 151; Tec, *Defiance,* 153; Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 139; Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 303. (Arad claims that Miłaszewski's unit, named after Tadeusz Kościuszko, had joined the Soviet partisan movement in that area. That is not the case, and Soviet documents confirm this, as well as that unit's attack on the German garrison in Iwieniec on June 19, 1943, described earlier. See Boradyn, *Niemen—rzeka niezgody,* 286–87.) Hersh Smolar, a Jewish partisan from Zorin's unit, describes the events in Sobkowszczyzna as follows:

> One day we heard the awful news that in the nearby village of Sharkovshchisna [sic—it was Sobkowszczyzna; Szarkowszczyzna is a town about 175 km to the north of Sobkowszczyzna], ten Jewish partisans of the Zorin brigade had been murdered by the cavalry unit of the Polish legion, led by Sgt. Zdzislaw Narkiewicz [Warrant Officer Zdzisław Nurkiewicz]—known as "Noc". How this happened we learned from Ber Shimonovitsh, a Jewish partisan who had managed to escape the slaughter. Another partisan, Lyova Cherniak, from the Minsk ghetto, was seriously wounded and left for dead, but we saved him. The testimony of these two men convinced the partisan leadership to dissolve the Polish legion. The local Polish partisans were distributed among our units. The entire staff was arrested and shipped to the hinterland on the first plane that landed on our forest air-strip. Narkiewicz and his men surrendered to the S.S. units [sic] and fought with them against the partisans.

See Hersh Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto: Soviet-Jewish Partisans Against the Nazis* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1989), 126. The claim that Nurkiewicz and his men joined up with SS units is a fabrication, which has become a staple of Jewish historiography. See, for example, Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 304. According to another source, based on a report by Arkadii Teif, a survivor of the attack, a Jewish combat platoon from the Zorin unit was on a mission at the time (September 1943, sic), when they were "ambushed by Polish partisans near Dubovnik." It is not clear what the nature of this mission was: combat (blowing up rails or attacking German or police garrisons) or requisitioning food in villages. After being betean up "all night," the Jewish partisans were shot "one by one." Teif and another partisan, Liova Cherniak, managed to escape. Allegedly, there was a "strong anti-Semitic attitude" among Polish partisans and they regularly ambushed Jewish guard posts. See Anika Walke, *Pioneers and Partisans: An Oral History of Nazi Genocide in Belorussia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 189–90.

There is considerable uncertainty surrounding the circumstances of this incident. Even after a thorough field investigation by a joint Polish-Soviet commission, which included Anatol Wertheim, a Jewish member of the Zorin unit, the bodies could not be located and the culprits ascertained. The Jewish partisans had ventured into an area that was, according to an agreement between the Home Army and the Soviet command, off limits to "economic" actions by the Soviet partisans. Despite warnings from Polish partisans stationed in Dubniki to leave the area, the Jews proceeded to plunder in nearby Sobkowszczyzna. Those villagers summoned the Polish partisans for assistance. After the Polish partisans dispersed the Jewish marauders, they returned to Dubniki to recover the horses and wagons used in their raids. They were then detained and, allegedly, shot somewhere outside the village, perhaps during an attempted escape. One of the Jews managed to flee and returned to his base with the news. It is unclear whether Warrant Officer Zdzisław Nurkiewicz ("Noc") was personally responsible for the execution of the Jewish pillagers, even though he was charged with that crime in Communist Poland in 1959 and sentenced to death (later commuted to a lengthy prison term). According to another source, a lancer by the name of Karpowicz, who was also sentenced to death by the Communist authorities after the war, may have been responsible for the execution. See Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Komentarze," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988), 168; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 83–88 (containing the complete report of the Polish-Soviet commission); A. Chackiewicz, "O rozbrojeniu formacji AK w Nalibockiej i Naroczańskiej puszczach w latach 1943–1944," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 81; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 122; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 155; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 422–23. Tellingly, the incident in Dubniki was not even raised during the interrogation of the Polish partisan leaders captured in Naliboki forest on December 1, 1943. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 167. Characteristcally, relying solely on Jewish accounts summarized in Tec's *Defiance*, German historian Bernhard Chiari focuses on this incident as "typical" of Polish-Jewish relations and ignores entirely the earlier massacre of Poles in Naliboki and the Narocz forest. See Chiari, *Alltag hinter der Front,* 283–84. Joshua Zimmerman mistakenly places the events in September instead of November. See Joshua D. Zimmerman, *The Polish Underground and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 275.

be executed on the spot.[336] As a rule, when Polish partisans apprehended intruders from the Soviet partisans they were handed over to the Soviet command.[337]

Hersh Smolar, a Jewish partisan from Zorin's unit, claims that the November 18, 1943 incident was the impetus for the Soviet partisan leadership to dissolve the Polish partisan fomation.[338] It is difficult, however, to view as a turning point an event that *followed* the massacre of 130 civilians in Naliboki (May 1943) and 80 members of Burzyński's partisan unit (August 1943). Moreover, even before the Sobkowszczyzna incident, plans had already been laid to eliminate the Polish partisans in that area,[339] so at best this was just another pretext to justify a strike against the Poles. Furthermore, there are credible reports that Jewish partisans from the Stalin Brigade and Chkalov Brigade operating in that area were actively

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[336] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 85–86, 132, 134.

[337] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 422–23; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 152. Sometimes Polish partisans administered a thrashing to recidivists caught pilfering in areas under their control and confiscated their spoils. Sulia Wolozhinski Rubin, a member of Bielski's Jewish partisans, recalled: "Boris' [Rubizhewski] brother [Izaak or Itsek] and a few others were caught in some partisan village area, their guns were taken away and held by the Poles and their commander Milashevski [Miłaszewski]. Our leader called for me and another fellow who spoke Polish well, and asked us to go to the Polish base and persuade the Poles to release our people. It was hoped that my knowledge of the language plus the fact that Krasicki [this name is not found in Polish sources—*M.P.*], Milashewski's adjutant, knew me well, would pull us through. … We passed a few Russian posts, exchanged greetings and, after an hour, came to a completely unknown part of the woods where the first Polish post let us pass. We had to pass two more. They were all tough looking fellows, yet they had all the grandeur of their uniforms including very shiny boots, brass buttons and elegant manners. We were very politely given an escort who took us to a regular house where Milashevski and his wife lived. The leader was polite as I presented our case. … He confirmed he had our men who had 'trespassed his territory' and would not tolerate such goings on. He was called outside … In the room with me was a pretty blonde girl who introduced herself as Halina, the commander's wife. I don't know how it came upon me but I had the feeling that she, too, was a Jewess. During the course of our conversation she admitted it and asked me for secrecy. … She was going to help all she could. … When Milashevski returned, Halina took him aside and whispered quite a bit. When he turned to me, he smiled, warned again about his 'territory', wrote a paper of release, shook hands with me and went out. … As I came out of the house, Izaak [Boris' brother] and the other two fellows plus their rifles (but minus the ammunition) were sitting inside the buggy. They looked haggard after the ordeal … We started toward our company … Courtesy was given to us till the end and we came to the last post … There was Milashevski himself on a horse. He stepped down, once more kissed my hand, the Polish way, complimented me on my language and manners, and I was given an open invitation to visit any time …" See Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 142–44. (There is no independent confirmation that Miłaszewski's wife was Jewish.) As mentioned earlier, Soviet reports refer to Itsek Rubezhevskii [Rubizhewski] as a rapacious plunderer who was caught repeatedly in the act. Sulia Rubin describes him as a violent drunkard. Another Jew who wrote in glowing terms about the warm and hospitable reception he and two other Jews received from everyone at the Polish partisan base in Derewno (Derewna), under Miłaszewski's command, was Anatol Wertheim, who eventually joined Zorin's detachment. See Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 137–40.

[338] Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto,* 126.

[339] As noted earlier, permission to carry out this operation was sought on November 4, 1943, by Platon (Vasilii Chernyshev), who headed the Soviet partisans in the Baranowicze district, and was given by General Ponomarenko, the first secretary of the Belorussian Communist Party and chief of general staff of the partisan movement in Western Belorussia, on November 14, 1943.

hunting down and eliminating members of the Polish underground already in the early part of October 1943.[340]

As Jewish accounts acknowledge, attacks on Polish partisans by Soviet and Jewish partisans intensified and spread throughout the Wilno area.

> In one attack, on March 5 [1944], the [Ordzhonikidze, i.e., Bielski's combatant] unit participated in a joint attack with Russian bands that eliminated forty-seven White Polish fighters and injured twenty-one.[341]

Other Jewish sources are equally unreliable about the goal of these operations (the first entry below refers to the same assault described immediately above). The primary targets were in fact Poles suspected of supporting the Home Army rather than Polish partisans as such.

> *5 March 1944*
> The detachment Ordzhonikidze took part in accomplishing a fighting mission organised by the Kirov Brigade, under the leadership of the brigade's commander, Captain Vasiljev [Vasiliev], to destroy the White Poles in the district of Lida, on the right bank of the Niemen. … During the fight the detachment went in the direction of Filenovcy [Filonowce near Dodukowo] and then moved in the direction of Petry [Piotry]. … After fulfilling the task the detachment returned to the camp. Seventy people took part in the task.
>
> *9 April 1944*
> The Ordzhonikidze detachment, under the leadership of the brigade's commissar, Comrade Kondiakov, fulfilled a combat task, worked out by the brigade, to destroy a group of White Poles in Lida district, on the right bank of the Niemen. The task set them to clear the White Poles from the villages of Burnosy, Milegovo [Mielgowo] and Biskopcy [Biskupce] and the farmstead of Biskopcy was completely achieved. Sixty people took part in the operation.[342]

Closer to Wilno, the struggle with the Polish partisans came to a fore when the Soviet partisans entered territory that was populated predominantly by Poles (as opposed to the mixed Polish-Belorussian areas to the east), and which was under the control of the Home Army. The Poles were adamant in standing firm in

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[340] Walczak, *13. Brygada Armii Krajowej Okręgu Wileńskiego,* 54–55. For an account of the murder of a captured Polish underground member, in September 1943, by a Soviet partisan group led by Berek Alterovich, and additional murders of civilians commited by Alterovich, see Zygmunt Błażejewicz, *W walce z wrogami Rzeczypospolitej: Partyzanckie wspomnienia z Wileńszczyzny i Podlasia* (Zwierzyniec and Rzeszów: Obywatelskie Stowarzyszenie "Ostoja", 2003), 12–13, 45–46.

[341] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 246. According to Soviet reports, the March 5 assault by the Kirov and Chapayev Brigades claimed 31 Polish fatalities, whereas Polish reports acknowledged only seven deaths. There is a significant discrepancy in Soviet losses as well (between 6 and 12). See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 262.

[342] Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 264–65. According to the Soviet register reproduced on pp. 186–87, in 1943 one quarter of the Kirov Brigade was Jewish. The April 9 assault is not noted in Boradyn's detailed register. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 266.

the face of Soviet encroachment. The main concentration of Soviet partisans was located in Rudniki forest (Puszcza Rudnicka), a large primeval wilderness situated to the south of the city of Wilno. As Yitzhak Arad notes, "Clashes and conflicts broke out between the Polish and Soviet partisans. The Jewish partisans in Rudniki [forest] took part in these clashes and suffered losses in the fighting with the Poles."[343] What Arad neglects to mention is that Soviet and Jewish partisans also attacked and murdered Polish partisans and civilians. The entries in the "operations diary" of Jewish partrsans from Rudniki forest mention the following assaults:[344]

> *1/44 [January 1944]*
> In the operation to destroy the armed village of Koniuchy, 30 fighters took part, of the units "Avenger" and "To Victory." (Commander: Jacob Prener)
>
> *4/44 [April 1944]*
> The building of the "White Poles" was burned down in the village of Niewojniance [Niewoniańce].
>
> *5/27/28/44 [May 27/28, 1944]*
> … On the way back [from arms requisitions in the villages of Jurkiańce and Krumińce] two "White Poles" were taken prisoner and the following arms in their possession were confiscated …

The fate of any Polish partisan who fell into the hands of the Soviet and Jewish partisans, as well as their civilian supporters, was also sealed. The following Jewish accounts illustrate this point.

> One day a fighting unit set off for the Lithuanian village of Yurkents [Jurkiańce] near the town of Olkieniki. … On the way back they took captive two uniformed and armed officers in the Polish bands. Besides the weapons, the unit brought back to camp a radio receiver, a large quantity of food, and various belongings. The two Polish officers were executed.[345]

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[343] Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 459. There were four units composed mostly of Jews fighting under Soviet command in Rudniki forest.

[344] "Operations Diary of a Jewish Partisan Unit in Rudniki Forest, 1943–1944," in Arad, Gutman, and Margaliot, *Documents of the Holocaust,* 463–71. The assault on Koniuchy, where at least 40 civilians were killed, is described and discussed in detail later in the text. The assault on Niewoniańce occurred on April 27, 1944: two families of Home Army members—consisting of eight people—were murdered and their farmsteads burned to the ground. See Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 511. Jewish authors refer to these assaults as "anti-German military missions." See Tec, "Reflections on Resistance and Gender," in Roth and Maxwell, *Remembering for the Future,* vol. 1, 559; Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 281.

[345] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 194.

> If Jewish and Polish partisans met on a path away from camp, there might be a fight. The next day a Jew would be missing, or else he would stumble into a roll call dazed but triumphant, a Polish pistol in his pants.[346]

> And then we came to the Niemen, we heard shots coming from all sides which later on, we discovered it was our own guys who were patrolling the area of the edge of the forest near the Niemen that they didn't know what's going on. And they thought sort of maybe the Poles, the AK [Armia Krajowa], are trying to come on this side. Because they didn't look like an army, and, therefore, they fired the shots. A few casualties were done, nothing is done to my platoon but some of the others.[347]

> We suffered a lot from the Polish partisans of the area so a decision was made to clear Smorgon [Smorgonie] and Vistoma [Wojstom] from both Germans and the Polish AK. … [in mid–March 1944] our specific brigade was transferred in sleds to the direction Vistoma, to fight the Polish Whites. …
>
> The Poles were waiting for us. Right at dawn the battle began, but it was a children's play in comparison to the Smorgon battle [against the Germans]. We had the upper hand both from the point of weapons and numbers. So all we wanted was to have the fewest number of victims from our side. We let the Pole [sic] shoot until their ammunition was dwindling. At nine in the morning they started retreating to the North West. We were too tired to follow them closely. We entered Vistoma. The town was burning. There were many bodies of Polish fighters and residents of the city. We called the residents to stop the fire. It was a big day of victory. Vodka was spilled like water everywhere. The town mayor, the police and the collaborators that didn't escape were executed. I think that this was a happy day for some of the women in the town [who were likely raped—*M.P.*].[348]

Polish accounts confirm the inhumane treatment meted out to captured Polish partisans who, according to international law, should have been treated as prisoners of war.

> On June 5, 1944 there was an altercation near Tołmuciszki between an unknown Polish unit and a Soviet partisan unit. Two Polish partisans perished in this battle and two more were taken captive

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[346] Cohen, *The Avengers,* 114.

[347] Interview with Harold Zissman, May 24, 1995, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.

[348] Account of Zalman Uri Gurevitz in A. Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.* Compare with Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 210, 217.

> and were killed in a cruel manner. On the body of one of them they left a note saying that every Pole will meet this fate.[349]

The families of Home Army members considered themselves fortunate if they were simply robbed of their possessions and livelihood. According to a typical Soviet-Jewish report from that period,

> *1 June 1944*
> The first and the 2nd companies of the [Bielski's Ordzhonikidze] detachment … in the district under the White Poles in the area of Ruda-Gancevichi [Hancewicze]-Guta [Huta], took away 34 cows belonging to the families of White Poles …[350]

Perhaps this is not surprising. After all, neither the Soviets nor the Germans respected the rules of warfare, and routinely murdered their opponent's prisoners of war. Soviet partisans fared no better and repaid captured German soldiers in kind.[351] The Soviets, and less so the Germans, often doled out the same treatment to Polish prisoners of war. When it came to Polish partisans, and their supporters, they were shown no mercy.

That there were Polish retaliations and Soviet counter-retaliations was not surprising. Few, if any, of the Polish operations were directed specifically at Jews. Rather, as the following accounts describing an assault on Polish partisans near Radziusze on February 2, 1944 show, Jews fell as members of Soviet partisan forces. Home Army members and their sympathizers apprehended by the Soviets could not expect any mercy at the hands of their captors.

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[349] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 239. For additional examples of captured Polish partisans being brutally murdered by Soviet partisans see Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 116, 133; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 198–99. Tellingly, one of the issues raised by the Soviets in their discussions with the Home Army was why Polish partisans did not kill disarmed German soldiers. The Poles replied that they respected international law, which forbade the killing of prisoners of war; since the Poles did not have camps to detain German soldiers, they had no choice but to release the Germans after disarming them. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 231. Jewish sources confirm that the Soviets did not respect the rules of war: "Standing orders were to shoot all German prisoners except officers, who were interrogated and then transferred to the partisan head of the region, General Platon." See Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 331.

The same pattern prevailed elsewhere in Poland. For example, a Jew who fought with the Soviet partisans in the Biała Podlaska area recalled: "White Polish partisans appeared in the forests and they fought us with greater hatred than they fought the Germans. We fought back and gave them the treatment they deserved. … We too killed them when we caught them. Once when our troop was returning from a sabotage operation, and passing close by a village, they shot at us from an ambush. … We decided to teach them a lesson and make an example of them … At night some of our troops surrounded the village and set it on fire. Any one [sic] trying to escape was shot and killed. No one survived from this village and no house remained standing. The partisans [sic] war was a war of life and death. We took no prisoners—anyone captured was killed following interrogation." Account of Shneor Glembotzky, in Alufi and Barkeli, *"Aishishuk"; Its History and Its Destruction,* 77.

[350] Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 266.

[351] For example, Paul Sack, a Jew from Głębokie who joined the Soviet partisans, recalled that, on one occasion, his battalion killed 36 captured German SS soldiers. See The "1939" Club, *The Legacy of the Partisans,* Internet: <http://www.1939club.com/The%20Legasy%20of%20the%20Partisans.htm>.

When we arrived at Gvardia, we were issued new submachine guns and short carbines with plenty of ammunition. Most of the men in the Gvardia and Nikolaev's otriads were trained in partisan fighting, and had been parachuted behind the German lines.

The entire specgruppa [a *spetsgruppa* is an NKVD unit of paratroopers on a special assignment—*M.P.*] consisted of over 150 partisans, well-armed and in good shape. … We were now a total of six Jews in the Gvardia …

Dawn was breaking when we came back out of the woods and into the open fields of a village near Oczmiany [Oszmiana], which was held by the AK [Armia Krajowa]. Manochin's [Manokhin's] brigade and our specgrupppa converged in that area and we spread out. This was the first time that a Soviet partisan force of such magnitude had moved into AK territory.

I saw the village from afar. Our commissar came galloping up on horseback and told us that it was essential to take this village from the AK. … The AK had launched a surprise attack on one unit of the Manochin otriad inside the woods. The unit began to retreat. Another unit of the Manochin otriad came to their rescue and stopped the attack.

Our mission was to go around the village and to reach the AK from behind.

I shot at anything that was moving. The AK partisans began to flee in panic in all directions. They hadn't expected to be attacked from behind. We tried to shoot them down or to capture them. Within minutes it was all over. Most of the AK, however, managed to escape into the swamps. We counted only six killed and five captured. Some of the captured AK members wore German uniforms. The only thing that distinguished them … were their armbands that said WP, which was the symbol of the Polish forces, and their caps which displayed a crowned eagle, a Polish emblem. Four of the Manochin otriad were killed. …

We stayed in the village because we were all too exhausted to move on. … Before we left we buried our dead. … The AK dead were handed over to the villagers for burial. …

Toward evening I heard movement. I lay down silently and saw a cart with one farmer on it. I decided to capture him. … He was a Pole in his twenties. I took him to the commander and returned to my post. I was soon relieved by another partisan. When I came back to the base, the farmer was being interrogated by one of our partisans, who was also a Pole. Since I had also spoken Polish when I captured the young farmer, he was sure that we were all AK and began to tell us everything that was happening in the area.

We found that there were two AK brigades in the vicinity, and that they were very well armed with equipment they received from the Lithuanians, in return for promises that they would fight the Soviet partisans. Our captured farmer was also acting as a courier for the AK since he could not leave his farm to join them. … If the Soviet army arrived, the farmers were to leave for the woods and form partisan groups to fight the Soviets, whom they perceived as enemies. …

The poor farmer turned white and almost fainted. He began to plead for his life, promising to do anything we ordered and to cooperate with us fully. Nikolaev placed him under guard and we prepared to move on.

> When dusk set, we departed. On the way I heard a shot … I never saw the captured farmer again.[352]

Within a month of the attack on the Home Army near Radziusze, Polish partisans led a successful strike in Mejrańce (or Majerańce) against the Kalinauskas unit of the Voroshilov Brigade, which was notorious for its raids (entailing robbery and murders) on the civilian population.[353] Yitzhak Arad captures the tail end of these events as follows:

> On March 1, 1944, a Polish force of hundreds of fighters surrounded the fifty-man Kostas Kalinauskas unit of our brigade. The battle, near the village of Maironi [Mejrańce] in the vicinity of Podbrodzie, went on for several hours. About half the partisans fell, among them the commander of the unit. The rest broke through the surrounding forces and retreated. The Poles murdered all the wounded who remained in the field. The unit had many Jews, and some of them were among those whom the Poles killed. …
>
> The following day in the forest we questioned the Pole [the son of a woman whom the Soviet partisans had turned to for provisions] about the Home Army and their collaborators in the area. At first he refused to talk, but after rather rough treatment he broke down and told us a great deal about their activities. It became clear that his unit was the one that had attacked the Kostas Kalinouskas [sic] partisans and caused them heavy losses. After intensive interrogation, the Pole was executed. He begged for mercy, but that did not help him.[354]

What was the fate of Jewish partisans at the hands of the Poles? Although Holocaust memoirs and other Jewish sources speak of large numbers of victims, scholarly studies do not support this claim. After detailing the murder of scores of Jews at the hands of Soviet partisans, Israeli historian Dov Levin attributes to "White Poles" fourteen combat deaths, out of the 156 Jewish partisans from the Kaunas and Wilno regions who perished in former Polish territories assigned to Lithuania and Western Belorussia.

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[352] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 182–83, 188–90, 193–94. Compare with Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 162–63, 206–207; Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 180; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 50. According to a Soviet report, around 15 "White Poles" were killed and 20 were injured. The Poles reported their losses as follows: one killed, one drowned, and four captured. The Soviet partisan losses were many times greater.

[353] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 208; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej w pierwszej połowie 1944 roku na Wileńszczyźnie," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 167; Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 50.

[354] Arad, *The Partisan,* 161–62.

Sixteen Jewish partisans were reportedly killed by fellow partisans (Soviet and Jewish) and 92 by the Germans and allied Lithuanian forces.[355]

Without offering much by way of evidence, Yitzhak Arad accuses the Home Army of murdering "hundreds of Jews in family camps or hiding with farmers."[356] There is a dearth of hard evidence to back this claim. Not one member of the 1,200-strong Bielski family group was killed by a Polish partisan, or by any Pole for that matter, whether as Soviet partisans or as Jews. Indeed, Bielski's group suffered very few casualties because they rarely engaged in combat with the Germans. Most of their losses, as we shall see, were a result of internal frictions.

Jews who fought with the Home Army in the Wilno area do not report assaults on Jews by the Polish underground. Józef Szczeciński (later Joseph Stevens), a Jew who posed as a Pole in Rukojnie near Wilno, joined the Home Army (he used the *nom de guerre* "Szczupak") and took part in various anti-German operations (disrupting communications by cutting telephone lines, spreading nails, throwing grenades and

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[355] Levin, *Fighting Back,* 191. The Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest included a number of policemen from the Wilno ghetto, and at least six of them were executed as informers or German collaborators allegedly by order of the commanders of their partisan units and the "special department" of the brigade headquarters. They included Natek (Natan) Ring, Vovek Zaltzstein, Lotek Zaltzwasser or Salzwasser (Lutek Zalcwasser), Schwarzbard (Szwarcbord), and Szurka Kewes (Kwas). Zaltzstein and Zaltzwasser were accused by two Jewish partisans of having revealed Jewish hideouts and dragging out Jews during the *Aktion* of December 1941. (Vitka Kempner states that she found Zaltzwasser in hiding and brought him to the forest so that he might be executed.) Two of the policemen had participated in the liquidation of the Oszmiana ghetto, blowing up hiding places, revealing where Jews were hiding, and handing Jews over to the Gestapo. A Jewish partisan from Kaunas named Meishe Gerber was executed for treason. See Testimony of Abram Mieszczański, dated June 10, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2536; Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 210, 280 n.9; Levin, *Fighting Back,* 210, 280 n. 9; Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 144, 158–59; Alex Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 1996), 311–14; Cohen, *The Avengers,* 121–22; Nathan Cohen, "The Last Days of the Vilna Ghetto—Pages from a Diary," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 31 (2003): 42 n.78; Porat, *The Fall of a Sparrow,* 139, 166; Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 289–90. Isaac Kowalski lists these persons among the Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 406–407. Isaac Kowalski describes the execution of his Jewish schoolmate from Wilno named Goldin, who became an informer for the Gestapo and tried to infiltrate the Jewish partisans operating in that area. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 310–11; also reproduced in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 406. The killing of Natek Ring by Isser Schmidt, a Jewish Communist and special agent known as Davidovsky sent to the Soviet Jewish Brigade operating in Rudniki forest south of Wilno, is described as follows: "He took to hunting Jews who collaborated with the Germans. … In the winter of 1943, he grew suspicious of Natek Ring, a Jewish policeman from the ghetto. Ring was charged with collaborating. In the ghetto, Jews had seen him lead enemy soldiers to rooms where people were hiding. On his latest venture [to Wilno], he had moved through the city with surprising ease; some felt he was even now working for the Germans. Isser was bareheaded as he led Natek into the trees. Two shots and the birds stopped singing. Isser came back down the trail alone, wearing a fur cap and new boots." See Cohen, *The Avengers,* 121–22. Anatol Krakowski mentions an execution of a Jewish partisan by the Soviets and frequent cases of Jewish partisans being killed due to mishandling of explosives and as casualties of "friendly fire" by fellow Jewish partisans. See Anatol Krakowski, *Le Ghetto dans la forêt: Résistance en Lituanie, 1939–1945* (Paris: Le Félin, 2002), 57, 58, 63–64, 69–70 (the drowning of a Jewish partisan), 79, 83, 87. Chaim Lazar states that non-Jewish partisans who had previously served in the German-sponsored police forces or had worked for the Gestapo, even those who had played an active role in killing Jews, were not subjected to such treatment. He also describes the executions of three Jewish partisans by Russian and Lithuanian partisans. See Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 143, 169, 171.

[356] Arad, *The Partisan,* 161. Shmuel Krakowski lists some of the assaults on Jewish partisans in this area in Gutman and Krakowski, *Unequal Victims,* 131; however, he provides none of the necessary background or context to properly assess these cases. Yaffa Eliach's writings are totally unreliable. Jewish memoirs, which are often contradictory, unreliable and full of hearsay, are quick to attribute Jewish losses to the Home Army without substantiating these claims. For example, Ruzhka Korchak claims that five fighters from Rudniki forest sent on a mission to Naliboki "all fell in the battle with the White Poles." Alex Faitelson, who was part of that very mission, writes: "None of the fighters who were sent to bring weapons from Nalibok [sic] fell in battle. See Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945,* 363.

laying mines to slow down and destroy convoys), as well as confiscating weapons hidden by farmers. In his memoir, he does not mention any misdeeds by the Polish underground against Jews.[357] George Sten, another Jew who posed as a Pole, served in the Home Army's Third Brigade in the Wilno region, under the command of Lieutenant Gracjan Fróg ("Góral", "Szczerbiec"),[358] does not mention any activities directed at Jews in his memoir either. On one occasion, the commander turned away a small group of Jewish stragglers who wanted to join the underground, but they were not harmed in any way by the Poles. While noting anti-Jewish sentiments among some of the partisans, Sten, who concealed his Jewish identity, attests to their valour and readiness to fight the Germans and their Lithuanian collaborators. He does not suggest that Polish partisans were preoccupied with killing Soviet and Jewish partisans for sport, as some would have it, though they did once eliminate a bunker with about six Soviet partisans who were known to rob peasants in the area. Moreover, Sten's memoir confirms German reports regarding the high level of internal discipline within the Home Army and the Home Army's policy to maintain proper relations with the Polish and Belorussian villagers. The Polish partisans are portrayed as brave and motivated patriots, and not as fanatical, bloodthirsty chauvinists.

> The Lithuanian Police and the Germans were constantly after us. … Small units of Germans and Lithuanian policemen kept bothering us, but on the whole, after a number of skirmishes, we were the winning side. …
>
> Early one morning in the middle of January 1944 … A detachment of Germans and Lithuanian policemen were advancing through this open field towards us, with one machine gun and carbines firing. We returned fire with our carbines, and, a few minutes later, our machine guns were in place and we opened fire on the advancing enemy. …
>
> After about ten minutes of this exchange of fire, the enemy started to retreat. … the Germans and Lithuanians had retreated completely, leaving behind them a few dead, and the machine gun, some carbines and ammunition. They were routed although we had been caught without any forewarning. From that time on they did not molest us. We were the aggressors, not the Germans.
>
> One day four or five Frenchmen joined us. They were not soldiers, but had been working for the Germans, and had somehow got in touch with our intelligence and joined us. …
>
> The unit was growing—now we not only had the Frenchmen, we also had an Austrian deserter from the German army and some Dutchmen who had worked for the Germans on the railway. …
>
> We had in our unit Frenchmen and Dutchmen and one Austrian, but they would not take Jews. At least *they did not kill them*. [emphasis added]

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[357] Joseph Stevens, *Good Morning* (Allendale, Michigan: Grand Valley State University, 2001), 92–96, 114–15, 144–45, 152–54, 160. See also the testimony of Joseph Stevens, Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, University of Southern California, Interview code 21089. Stevens points out that the Home Army would cut telephone lines far away from villages in order to avoid German reprisals on villagers. Their disruptive tactics were not particularly effective because the Germans kept coming up with counter-strategies.

[358] Lieutenant Gracjan Fróg ("Szczerbiec") left Wilno for the forests in 1943 as part of *Ruch Narodowo-Radykalny—Falanga*, a radical nationalist underground organization. In October 1943, Fróg united various partisan units as the King Bolesaw Chrobry Mobile Unit. In November the unit came under the authority of the Home Army, and in January 1944 it was renamed the Third Wilno Brigade of the Home Army.

> We were billeted in the village. The natives were Bielo-Russians [Belorussians]. They spoke Polish, but between themselves they spoke Bielo-Russian, which is closer to Ukrainian and Russian than to Polish. Even though they had to feed us, they were glad that we were there, because when Polish partisans were in a village the Germans and their Lithuanian proxies kept away and did not plunder.
>
> The discipline in the outfit was generally rigid. I did not hear about any stealing from the peasants, or rapes or attempted rapes, which were common with the Lithuanian Police and the Russian partisans. During my time with the outfit [i.e., from the fall of 1943 to July 1944—*M.P.*] there were two or three court martials for beating a peasant and one, I remember, for pack-raping a local village whore.[359]

Leon Kahn provides one of the more detailed accounts of an assault by Polish partisans on a family camp.[360] Kahn's father and sister had found shelter with a small group of Jews in a forest near Jurele, a village located south of Ejszyszki and north of the town of Nacza. The Jewish forest group received extensive assistance from Polish villagers in the area. As a result of a firefight between a Home Army detachment and a Soviet partisan unit in which several partisans fell, Kahn's father and sister were also killed in unclear circumstances. The altercation occurred around October 26, 1943, which is after the Soviet partisans had attacked Burzyński's partisan unit. The Home Army assault was sparked by a visit to the Soviet camp by a dozen Soviet partisans, both Jews and non-Jews, from the Lenin Komsomol Brigade based in Nacza forest and the Davydov (Davidov) otriad based in Lipiczany forest. Prior to that time the Jewish family camp had experienced no problems from the surrounding population or Polish partisans.

There was a history of bad blood between the Home Army and the Lenin Komsomol Brigade from as far back as June 1943. The Lenin Komsomol Brigade were notorious marauders who were amassing huge quantities of provisions for the winter months, targeting areas that were farther removed from their base in

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[359] George Sten, *Memoirs of a Survivor* (Bondi Junction, New South Wales: n.p., 1996), 38–67.

[360] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 142–44. In his introduction to the second edition of his *Fugitives of the Forest: The Heroic Story of Jewish Resistance and Survival During the Second World War* (Guilford, Connecticut: Lyons Press, 2009), at p. xxxiii, Allan Levine writes, "According to [Mark] Paul, the AK attack Kahn describes was in retaliation for 'a murderous Soviet attack' on an AK partisan unit. Why Kahn's father and young sister were killed is not addressed." He goes on to say, "Never once does Paul or other detractors like him ask why Kahn or any Holocaust survivor would concoct such tales? And, 'making Poles look bad' is not the answer. Indeed, there is no logical response because certain terrible memories remain etched in a person's mind forever." Clearly, Levine is trying to obfuscate the issue and relies on his readers' gullibility. The fact that Kahn's father and sister were killed was never in dispute, so the supposed charge that Kahn concocted the story is a straw man. Unfortunately, bystanders were often killed in attacks, especially in those carried out by the Soviet partisans with whom Kahn was associated. The purpose of an examination of the surrounding circumstances of such events is to put them in context, something that Levine's writing is sorely lacking.

the Nacza forest.[361] They had acquired a terrible reputation in the countryside for their brutal behaviour toward the farmers.[362] On December 25, 1943, they murdered 12 Poles in a forester's lodge near Kamionka where they had previously received shelter and food.[363] Had the Home Army wanted to liquidate the enitre brigade it could have done so easily given their undisputed superiority in this region at the time.[364]

After the October 1943 altercation, Jewish partisans caught up with the farmer who had allegedly betrayed them to the Polish partisans and exacted their cruel revenge:

> We detoured to Nowicki's farm. *I had no definite proof that he had betrayed us*, but every indication pointed at him. … But Nowicki's pleas fell on deaf ears. Repeatedly, I stabbed him over and over again with my bayonet … for the moment I was glad. But Nowicki was not dead. I had inflicted something far more horrible on him: he was blinded and maimed. He lived out the rest of his life unable to see, speak, or function in any normal way.[365] [emphasis added]

> We came up to his house and I kicked the door and he was standing there and he said … and right away he started, right away denying "I had nothing to do with it! I wouldn't do it to your father! I

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[361] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 133. Abraham Asner, a member of the Lenin Komsomol Brigade, recalled: "The area was mostly poor … We used to go far away to get some food. … And mostly we carry on the horses. … the cattle used to walk by itself. And flour we used to carry it on our backs. … I used to carry myself, and some other men like me, around fifty kilogram potatoes on the back and a rifle and grenades all together. … we used to get the food from the areas … about twenty and twenty-five kilometers. We, we don't want to bother the close villages." See the testimony of Abraham Asner, October 10, 1982, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Internet: <http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu/asner/ >, section 18 (Organizing the Underground 2). Abraham Asner was one of four brothers from the town of Nacza who joined the Lenin Komsomol Brigade. In his testimony, Asner describes the Soviet partisans' killing of alleged spies (section 34, Polish Underground; section 56, Spies) and his youngest brother's death as a result of an altercation with Home Army partisans (sections 43, 44). According to Leib Levine, the latter incident occurred in the village of Puziele, where Jewish partisans would call on a group of Jews (Leib Levine, his wife, and Chaia Rogovska, staying in the home of Wojciech Szafkowski) who were involved in espionage for the Lenin Komsomol Brigade. See Leib Levine, "In Radun," in Freda Hodge, comp., *Tragedy and Triumph: Early Testimonies of Jewish Survivors of World War II* (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2018), 50–57, at 52–54.

[362] Leon Kahn provides the following description of the Lenin Komsomol Brigade: "It wasn't long before they established a reputation as thieves, drunks, and rapists in the farm country surrounding the forest. They were a thoroughly reprehensible group … They were led by a Russian Jew from Gorki whose name was Elia Grace. A soldier in the Russian army, he had been stationed in the Nacha [Nacza] forest when the Russians retreated. The men from Siberia, untrained but toughened by hardship, gathered about him. Grace named the group the Leninski Komsomol and taught them the skills of war." Ibid., 88. The Davydov otriad also gained a reputation for drunkenness, excessive even by prevailing Soviet partisan standards, which was mentioned in a Soviet report from January 1944. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 87. According to Jewish sources, Davydov was himself Jewish and his company included Jews. See Kahn, *No Time to Mourn,* 127; L. Koniuchowsky, "The Liquidation of the Jews of Marcinkonis: A Collective Report," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Studies* 8 (1953): 221–22.

[363] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 205.

[364] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 120–21, 133. The incident in question was part of a series of attacks and counterattacks in this area which are chronicled in Zygmunt Boradyn's "Kalendarium walk i potyczek oddziałów partyzanckich AK z partyzantką sowiecką w okresie okupacji niemieckiej," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 146; Boradyn, *Niemen–reka niezgody,* 249–50.

[365] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 158.

> loved your father!" and so on. Anyway I told him to say his prayers. And I wasn't going to shoot him. I bayoneted [him], you know, maybe, I don't know, maybe 50 times. I really, really felt the time had come to pay back. I didn't do it enough. I am only sorry I didn't do it more.[366]

Altercations between the Home Army and the Soviet partisans escalated dramatically in the fall of 1943 when a contingent of some 100 Soviet partisans from Rudniki forest, most of them Jews from the "Struggle" and "Death to Fascism" units of the so-called Vilnius (Wilno) Brigade, was dispatched to establish a base in the Nacza forest. By that time, the activities of the Soviet partisans had given rise to considerable friction and the expansion of the Soviet partisans into Nacza forest, an area largely under the contol of the Home Army, was regarded as an unwelcome intrusion. The resultant confrontations are attributable to the prevailing atmosphere of hostility on the part of the Soviet partisans toward the Polish partisans and the local population, and Polish retaliations were in no way related to the ethnic or religious make-up of the Soviet partisans. Eventually, the commanders of the Jewish partisan contingent sent to Nacza forest, Berl Szeroszniewski and Chaim Lazar, decided to return to the Rudniki forest, taking with them most of the weapons and the best fighters, and leaving their less fortunate Jewish comrades to fend for themselves.[367]

The experiences of Abraham Lipkunsky (later Avraham Aviel), who hails from Dowgieliszki, a small rural settlement near Raduń, are also telling.[368] After escaping from the ghetto in Raduń, Abraham and his older brother made their way back to Dowgieliszki where they were fed and sheltered by many Polish farmers. They met up with their father, who had escaped from the ghetto earlier and was living in the nearby forest. The group of fugitives relied on the assistance of a number of Poles for their survival: "We also started to visit other farmers who had been friends of the family, particularly those who had been Father's friends in the past. … These farmers who had been Father's friends would give us bread and milk still warm from the cow, and also bread for the following day."[369] Despite the increasing number of German soldiers and police units scouring the countryside for escaped Jews, "many farmers who had been friends in the past, managed to overcome their fears and help us out with food and advice. More than once, they endangered themselves in the process."[370] Apart from the Germans, the immediate threat to the Jews' safety was former Soviet soldiers hiding in the forests. One farmer "warned us against an armed Russian who was

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[366] WETA documentary *There Once Was a Town,* 2000.

[367] Abraham Zeleznikow, "Danke and Imke Lubotzki," in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 2 (1985), 416; Testimony of Abram Mieszczański, dated June 10, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2536; Testimony of Mania Glezer, dated June 19, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2517.

[368] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 126–286.

[369] Ibid., 135.

[370] Ibid., 148.

also roaming about in the area and who killed whoever he came across, including Jews, and added that he chased after a Jew from Dowgalishok [Dowgieliszki] and shot him."[371]

After taking temporary shelter with several Polish families, the Jewish group decided to build an underground bunker in the forest. They were reluctant to borrow tools from a local farmer "lest our purpose in borrowing them was revealed. Obviously, it had to be a complete secret." Therefore they embarked on a course of conduct that would assume an ever greater importance in their existence—robbery.

> We decided we would get the tools by dragging them from afar. One night, we walked a number of kilometers from the site we had decided on for a bunker, and stole from a farmer … The loot included a double saw, three axes, and three shovels. This was the first theft we had to carry out in order to survive but it was not the last.[372]

For poor farmers a heist such as this represented an enormous loss and threatened their very livelihoods.

In the early period, however, the Jewish fugitives tended to eschew violence during their expeditions. According to Lipkunsky,

> Unlike the partisans, we did not carry weapons, nor did we try to obtain them until then, though we could have had them for a comparatively cheap price. There was a sort of unstated agreement among the Jews of Dowgalishok [Dowgieliszki] not to use arms as long as there was no need to, so that the farmers would not be frightened when we came to ask for food and that they would not feel they were being forced to give us it. We did not wish to antagonize ae community which accepted our existence and had been tolerant towards us. We did not want to give them an excuse or pretext to drive us away. …
>
> Despite these considerations, we began to try to get weapons, not for our immediate use but to prepare for the time when we would have to leave the area or for any emergency that might arise.[373]

Increasingly, the forests were becoming a menacing place for individual Jews. The situation for farmers' was also becoming more precarious. Lipkunsky recalled:

> This called for great caution, as we had heard of various groups that roamed the forest. There were separate groups of Jews and Russians, and also mixed groups of Jews and Russians.
>
> The Russians in the forest were the remnant of the Soviet army who had been stranded behind the German front and not taken prisoner. Among these groups there were those who were murderers and thieves and they were prepared to rob, rape and kill whoever they encountered, especially Jews, out of blind hatred. …

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[371] Ibid., 133.

[372] Ibid., 156.

[373] Ibid., 166.

> One night in October 1942 we set out to meet Father. … During our conversation, he confirmed that the rumors were indeed true and that the previous evening, the partisans had visited Andzielevitz [Andzielewicz, a member of the Home Army, was one of Lipkunsky's benefactors; he also took in a Jewish convert from Raduń who lived in his house openly—*M.P.*], that most of them were Jews and the minority Russians, and that they were armed with weapons that included rifles, revolvers and hand grenades.
>
> Farmer Andzielevitz, who feared that they may take a pig or rob him of clothing or other things, brought Father out of hiding in order to show them that he was anti-German as well, so that they should do him no harm. This proved to be the case, for they did not take advantage of him but merely spent the night in the haystack in his barn, and used it as resting quarters throughout the following day. …
>
> In the course of these conversations Father learned that these partisan groups were not organized or armed, and that the existing groups did not execute or fulfill military roles … There were indeed smaller groups and some of their members had very old weapons. The rest had none at all. They lived in a similar fashion to our groups in the forests of Dowgalishok [Dowgieliszki]. The difference between us was that we received food from the farmers on the basis of our former good relationship from better times. The farmers gave us food and clothing of their own free will and also in exchange for goods that we had left other farmers. They, on the other hand, had to buy their food from farmers living near the puszcza [a primeval forest] and had no choice but to steal and plunder in order to stay alive. They went to farmers far from ancient forest and seized what they needed by intimidating them. Threatening them with arson was also effective if the farmer was reluctant to supply them with food.[374]

The Germans were also intensifying their efforts to rid the forests of armed groups and stragglers. The consequences for those who defied German decrees and helped Jewish fugitives and partisans were horrific. Lipkunsky recounts how a group of Jewish partisans who were carrying out raids in the area took refuge in a barn belonging to a Polish farmer named Daszkiewicz. After surrounding the barn, the Germans drove the Jews out, killing some of them. They then took the entire Daszkiewicz family including their small children into the courtyard and murdered them on the spot. The final act of retaliation was to set fire to the barn.

As could be expected, the conduct of the forest groups and the vigilance and cruelty of the German authorities brought about a change in the attitude of the farmers toward those who came around for assistance. Farmers became more and more reluctant to give up the little provisions they had. Some of them even turned to the German authorities for protection, and later—when the Polish partrisans became active in the area—the Home Army. Occasionally, villagers fended off the marauders or led the Germans to their hideouts. Lipkunsky reduces this complex set of circumstances to just one factor: hatred of Jews (anti-Semitism). He alleges that the Home Army, who was "supposedly" fighting the Germans, "saw it as their patriotic mission to help the Germans rid Poland of the Jews."[375] Adopting a similar rationale, one could

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[374] Ibid., 163–65.

[375] Ibid., 189.

view the "mission" of the Jewish partisans as simply one of collaborating with the Soviets to enslave Poland by destroying its pro-indepenence underground.

The Jewish forest groups that formed in the area were often inhospitable to outsiders. Abraham Paikovsky and his son Nahum were turned back several times, since no group would accept them as members.

> There they found a large underground bunker well prepared for the winter, and containing ample food supplies. When the occupants of the bunker realized that the newcomers had reached the place via evidence of the sleigh's tracks, they threatened to shoot them for following them … They demanded that Abraham and his son leave the place and when they refused, they kicked them out. Abraham begged them to let them stay, claiming that 'what you people discard and waste, would be more than enough for the two of us,' but nothing availed and Abraham and his son were forced to leave, returning once again to the vicinity of Dowgalishok [Dowgieliszki] …[376]

The Jewish forest groups gradually came under the control of the Soviet partisan command in the early part of 1943. Young men capable of bearing arms were transferred to the military units such as the Lenin Komsomol detachment, which was later transformed into the Kotovsky detachment of the Lenin Komsomol Brigade and included many Jews. The family groups that were left behind had been stripped of most of their weapons and had to fend for themselves: "They had to get their own food, with the aid of the limited arms at their disposal."[377] The newly formed partisan groups based in the Nacza forest, such as the one led by Elka (Eliahu) "Todros" Ariovitz (Elke Ariowitch "Todras" from Raduń), were quite enterprising. They stole shamelessly and in vast quantities.

> There was an ample quantity of fresh meat, since herds of cows or pigs were brought to the camp and kept at some distance. … The cows and pigs would be slaughtered according to need … [378]

> Here there was no problem of obtaining food, which was plentiful, nor did we lack clothing. When on a mission, we would take off our ragged and dirty clothes and change them for others at the homes of farmers.[379]

> … we were eager to spend the Day of Atonement with other Jews in order to fast and pray together. We decided, therefore, to go to Mezanze [Mieżańce] woods to be among the Jews there. *En route* to Mezanze, we passed through one of the nearby villages and stole a few chickens for the ritual

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[376] Ibid., 197.

[377] Ibid., 205.

[378] Ibid., 202.

[379] Ibid., 208.

> sacrifice on the eve of Yom Kippur (*kapparot*). Later on, we were ashamed to learn that we had taken the chickens from a friendly farmer.[380]

To carry out raids effectively weapons were needed and initially these weapons had to be procured from the local inhabitants.

> Elka obtained arms was still the farmers who had collected the weapons discarded by the Red Army during their panicky retreat in 1941. It needed intelligence work to find out who had hidden arms, but by threats and intimidation, indeed sometimes with blows, we would unearth the weapons …[381]

Conflicts also developed with non-Jewish groups and with the Soviet partisan command:

> There was suspicion and animosity particularly between the Jewish groups and the non-organized Russian groups. The source of much of this animosity was the girls in the Jewish groups. The Russians, who were given to drinking too much, would fall upon the Jewish girls, and there were even cases of rape, which naturally led to armed struggles between the Jews and the Russians.
>
> … the Russians were made up of small groups of two or three men, who were immensely mobile … They were well armed, and terrorized the farmers in the region.[382]

> One fine day we were shocked to learn that Elka Ariovitz ["Todros"] had been summoned before the headquarters of the Kotovsky unit and sentenced to death. The gist of the charge was that before the establishment of the unit, back in the past, he had robbed farmers and taken food and clothing from them 'illegally', and that this accounted for their unwillingness to cooperate with the partisans. A number of other charges were also invented to justify the sentence.

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[380] Ibid., 233. The information Yaffa Eliach provides about the "Todras" partisan group, led by Elke Ariowitch from Raduń, is also interesting. Based in the Nacza forest, to the south of Ejszyszki, that group took in many Jewish escapees who had survived in the forest thanks to the assistance of many Polish farmers they knew in the vicinity. Ibid., 631, 636. Jewish women were especially vulnerable to being raped by Soviet partisans in the area. On the other hand, the farmers in nearby villages were "generally speaking … hospitable" to the Jewish group, while others, whose food was "confiscated by force," were hostile. Executions of "hostile" farmers were not unheard of. See Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 637. Ariowitch eventually fell afoul of a Soviet partisan group, the Lenin Komsomol Brigade. Lieutenant Anton Stankevich, the newly arrived leader of the brigade, succeeded in recruiting able-bodied Jewish men and some young women from the "Todras" group, including Leon Kahn (Leibke Kaganowicz). (According to Eliach, "Jews were eager to join … [as] it was an opportunity to fight the Germans and the AK, and to settle scores with local collaborators." Ibid., 642.) Ariowitch reportedly had many enemies in the Lenin Komsomol Brigade, including "several hard-core Jewish Communist partisans who disapproved of Todras's devoting so much energy to the welfare of his followers." Ibid., 637. During Stankevich's absence, Todras was arrested and found guilty by a military court of taking food by force from some nearby villages. He was demoted, removed from his camp, and his people were disarmed. A few days later Ariowitch was tortured and then executed by the Communist partisans. Ibid., 638. The Jewish partisans in Stankevich's group continued to be "terrorized … sometimes with the help of the Jewish Communists." They also executed Yitzhak Botwinik, a Jewish partisan caught sleeping while on guard duty, and raped and murdered Jewish women. Ibid., 645.

[381] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 205.

[382] Ibid., 202.

> It was obvious to the Jews amongst us that behind the mask of so called 'justice', lurked blatant anti-Semitism and personal envy. …
>
> After the deaths of Elka Ariovitz and [commander Anton] Stankevitz [Stankevich] relations between the veteran Jewish fighters and the unit's command had deteriorated.[383]

The primary activity of the Soviet partisans was the relentless, and often violent, gathering of food provisions and clothing for their units. In desperation, villagers took matters into their own hands or turned to the Home Army to protect them from these unwelcome intruders. The partisan marauders were often caught in the act by the Home Army and pursued not because they were Soviets or Jews, but because they pilfered mercilessly. Smaller groups of Soviet partisans began to exercise more caution and even curtail their raids.

> The days when we would load a horse and wagon with provisions to be taken to the ancient forest were over. Not because of the possible danger from the Germans but because of the White Poles, who were lying in wait for us … Now, on returning to the forest, we packed a knapsack bursting at the seams with food supplies, bearing it on our backs together with the weapon each of us held in his hand. In addition to individual knapsacks, there were also heavier kitbags, which we took turns to carry.
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> It was an hour before midnight and the moon was rising in the sky, shedding light on the dust road we were walking along in Indian file. … We passed alongside the colonies of the village Lonki [Łunki] on our way to Saltanishok [Sołtaniszki] and Kovalka [Kowalki]. … Suddenly the silence was shattered by rifle fire, directed at us from behind the houses to the left and the rear. While dashing past, I saw a number of shadows moving around behind the houses. We were few and there was no point in starting a gun battle, so all we could do was to get up and run like the wind. … The frying pan and other utensils were knocking against one another and sounded like an orchestra of drums accompanied by cymbals. …
>
> There were many such encounters with the White Poles. … It was a miracle that in this ambush no one was killed, and when we arrived in the forest, all were alive and unhurt.
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> … The White Poles … were supported and assisted by their fellow farmers. In every village, they had contacts who supplied them with information, and they aware of the routes we would pass and where we were settled. This was the reason why we had to change our quarters so very frequently, for we had to be wary of every farmer who may reveal our whereabouts.[384]

The fate of the forest Jews who had survived on their own for more than a year, by begging for food from the farmers, took a dramatic turn for the worse when the Soviet (and Jewish) partisans moved into their area and established contact with them. They became tainted by association.

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[383] Ibid., 213, 249. See also Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 636, 638, who states that two of the partisans who murdered Ariovitz (Ariowitch) were Jews, thus undermining the charge that this was purely an anti-Semitic act. The first commander of the Lenin Komsomol Brigade, Anton Stankevich, was known for his friendly attitude toward Jews. Although a Pole by origin, he was not from the local population, but from the Minsk area of Soviet Belorussia. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 73.

[384] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 270–72.

> Liebke and her parents escaped to the forest and reached the neighborhood of the villages of Mezanze [Mieżańce] and Ivonza [Ejwuńce], and they turned to the farmers Winzia, Ambraziuk, and Marishka, and these were their contacts.
>
> These farmers were in the region of Radun [Raduń] and knew where the Jews were hiding. They did them no harm, not even revealing what they knew to others. … On more than one occasion, they endangered their lives in order to render assistance, or when hiding Jews from their pursuers and warning them of impending danger.[385]

> A few weeks after I reached the [Nacza] forest, a group of partisans went out on a mission to obtain food for the unit in the neighborhood of Dowgalishok [Dowgieliszki]. I joined this action, together with Abraham Paikovsky, as we knew the roads and farmers of this area. We also wanted to meet the Jews of Dowgalishok, tell them about the forest and try to convince them to return with us. We managed to locate them and stayed with them for a whole day. I met Father and urged him to return with me to the forest. … Unfortunately father did not react to my explanations, nor did the rest of the Jews. He did not refuse point-blank to go with me, but merely repeated his former arguments: 'Here I know everyone since I was a child and everyone knows me. I have worked for them and served them for many years, and they are my friends and would not do me any harm. Proof of this is that they have helped me until now and treated me with affection, as a friend. And what is more, now the area is ruled by the partisans, and the rumors of large Jewish partisan groups, they would not harm the Jews out of fear of reprisals.' …
>
> A short while after having parted from Father, another group of partisans set off for the Dowgalishok neighborhood, and I asked them to take him with them back to the forest. On their return, they gave me the terrible news that they had not met him and that the White Poles (the AK [Armia Krajowa]) had attacked all the Jews of Dowgalishok on the eve of Shavuoth and killed most of them, my father among them.[386]

The heaviest losses sustained by the family groups were not at the hands of the local population or the Home Army, however, but occurred during a massive, fifteen-day blockade of the Nacza forest by the Germans forces in June or July of 1943 when some seventy Jews were killed.[387] Moreover, any Pole suspected of actively supporting the Home Army or of being otherwise "hostile" became fair game for the Soviet and Jewish partisans.

Lipkunsky describes the case of a Pole from Raduń by the name of Vinzkovsky [Więckowski?] who had joined up with Ariovitz's forest group after the Germans learned of his involvement in an ambush on a group of policemen masterminded by the Polish commander of the local police. Vinzkovsky had a history of helping Jews and was considered to be "loyal to the Jews" and was "trusted by them." However, with the

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[385] Ibid., 243.

[386] Ibid., 210–12.

[387] Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 638–39; Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 179.

appearance of the Home Army in the area, Vinzkovsky's loyalty "began to be questioned." Fearing that he was planning to leave the Soviet-Jewish partisan group and join the Poles, the Jewish partisans "decided that he must be silenced." He was shot in the back when he went on patrol with three of his Jewish colleagues. Lipkunsky rationalized the execution in this way: "One can understand Vinzkovsky's motives in wanting to go over to the White Poles, for he knew that his life would be much better and more comfortable (after living in the forest for over a year and a half). To this very day, we do not know whether he managed to pass on any information concerning the whereabouts of the Jews to his fellow Poles."[388]

On another occasion, early one morning, Lipkunsky's group came across some woodcutters, a father and his son, in the forest.

> This aroused our suspicions, for since the advent of the White Poles, we no longer trusted any Polish farmer. We spread out in an encircling movement and advanced towards the woodchoppers, closing in on them from every side. … Their first reaction was to raise their axes against us, but these were quickly lowered when they saw that our rifles and guns were aimed at them. We were not interested in drawing any attention by the sound of firing and therefore we quietly bound them up, tying their hands lest they try to escape, and started to question them. This place was near the villages of Podemb and Boodes [Poddębie-Budy]—villages known for their animosity to the Jews and Russian partisans …
>
> To those among us who were in the know and had experience, they were evidently scouts and contacts of the White Poles or the Germans. We were faced with a hard dilemma—what was to be done with them? … After some discussion, we decided to kill them quietly—not by shooting. This would serve as a warning to the nearby village's [sic] not to enter the forest. So they were hanged, and buried under one of the trees, with the grave well-disguised.[389]

A Home Army unit eventually attacked the Soviet partisan unit in that area, burned their camp and killed some of the marauders. Suspecting that they had been betrayed by a farmer from the village of Montaty who knew where their camp was located, a group of Jewish partisans descended on the village just before sunset and murdered the farmer and torched his farm. In retaliation, Polish partisans again attacked the Soviet partisan camp killing a few more partisans.[390] Some of the more heinous crimes committed by the Soviet-Jewish partisans in the Raduń area are not mentioned in Jewish sources. For example, in the winter of 1943–1944, six women were burned alive in the hamlet of Sapuńce where the partisans also raped teenaged girls and young women. (When reading about such atrocities, one should bear in mind that, unlike

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[388] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 263–67. Abraham Asner gives a somewhat different and rather muddled account of the execution of an unnamed Pole who had joined the Soviet partisans but was suspected of having contacts with the Home Army. See the testimony of Abraham Asner, October 10, 1982, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Internet: <http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu/asner/>, section 34 (Polish Underground).

[389] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 273–74.

[390] Ibid., 279–85. See also Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 649, for a somewhat different version which lacks important context.

Jewish victims, non-Jewish victims could not seek redress against the perpetrators after the Soviet "liberation," because Soviet partisans were considered to be "heroes" of the Fatherland and their victims were by definition "Nazi collaborators.")

Lipkunsky's group also served as "an intelligence source" in the area: "The task given to us by the unit was to gather intelligence and convey it to the unit. Once every week or two, five of us would leave for the unit to hand over information and receive instructions." Lipkunsky acknowledges that his group was "not equipped nor suited to engage in armed conflicts with the Germans or the Poles."[391] As we shall see, many of the Jewish partisans, Lipkunsky among them, continued to serve the Soviets after the arrival of the Red Army. They willingly joined the NKVD, "whose principal responsibility was to help the Red Army uncover White Poles and bring them to the security police to be investigated."[392] Thousands of Home Army members were arrested, and many of them perished. Yet at no point in his lengthy memoirs does Lipkunsky raise the question of whether robbing and spying on the local population could have had an impact on the attitude of the Poles or whether fighting alongside the Soviet partisans, whose aim it was to eradicate the Home Army and enslave Poland, could have been the source of some of the conflict with the local population and the Home Army.

Yet another memoir,[393] by Leib Reizer, read in conjunction with that author's account recorded in 1945 by the Jewish Historical Commission in Poland,[394] sheds additional light on relations between Jewish partisans and the surrounding population and Polish underground. Leib Reizer (Lejb Rajzer or Rejzer), a native of Grodno, escaped from the Grodno ghetto in February 1943, together with his wife and young daughter. Accompanied by a group of armed Jewish fugitives, twenty-six in total, they made their way to Nacza forest where they joined up with the Soviet partisans. Although his pro-Soviet sympathies are discernible, Reizer does not divulge in his memoir, as he did in his postwar account, that the underground group he belonged to in the Grodno ghetto was Communist. He spares no opportunity, however, to vilify the Poles, who according to Reizer considered the Germans to be the "new Messiah,"[395] and to accuse them of all kinds of misdeeds (even in areas where few Poles lived) for which he offers virtually no proof. "From the start," he writes, "the Poles morally capitulated to the enemy. Most of them dreamed that Hitler would rebuild Poland for them."[396] It is quite obvious that we are not dealing with an objective observer.

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[391] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 267, 268.

[392] Ibid., 290.

[393] Leib Reizer, *In the Struggle: Memoirs from Grodno and the Forests* (New York and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem and The Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, 2009).

[394] Testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/555.

[395] Reizer, *In the Struggle*, 38, 39.

[396] Ibid., 123.

Once outside Grodno the Jewish fugitives immediately fell into a course of conduct that came to characterize their dealings with the largely destitute rural population.

> Along the way, we stopped at rich [sic] peasants' homes, shook awake the sleepy owners, and sent in a delegation to demand food. The peasants did not refuse us—out of respect for our guns—and gave us bread, pig's fat and other foodstuffs. In one place, my companions were given [sic] a calf, which they slaughtered in the snow and stowed on the sleigh. One peasant gave us a bucket of tallow. We "borrowed" a saw and an axe from one peasant, so that we would be able to build a cabin in the forest.[397]

After arriving at his destination, Reizer was accepted by the Lenin Komsomol detachment.[398] The farmers in the immediate vicinity of the partisan encampment in Nacza forest, who were spared requisitions in order not to antagonize them, were presumed to be well disposed toward the Soviet partisans: "The place was not far from the path that led to the villages of Sultaniszki [Sołtaniszki], Soleczniki Wielki [Wielkie] and Dubicze. The peasants in these villages were very poor and reacted to the partisans with sympathy."[399] Further afield, however, the partisans robbed voraciously: "Our comrades led us through dark nights via highways and byways, with guns in hand, and taught us how to supply ourselves with food. We went to faraway cottages and woke the peasants, who trembled like leaves."[400] It was not just the Russian (and Belorussian) partisans who had a bad reputation. As Reizer admitted in his postwar account, but neglected to mention in his otherwise much embellished memoir,

> Among us Jews there were also those who behaved like wolves; those wild men took from the villagers more food than was allowed. They also took clothing and other objects which were not necessary for our people. In those cases, our commander [Stankevich] had to draw this especially to my attention, demanding that I not permit such behaviour. For such behaviour he once put those greedy Jews to account; they were Pesach Manes, Zelman Mednicki and Berl Miler. Thanks to my intervention they were let off, but their weapons were taken from them.[401]

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[397] Ibid., 154–55.

[398] According to another account, the unit was augmented by young Jews from Lida, Raduń, Wasiliszki, and other towns, until in numbered about eighty members, of whom more than 30 were from Grodno. The rest of Reizer's group lived in a family camp numbering some 96 members; most of them were killed during a German raid on the Nacza forest in July 1943. The Leninski Komsomol partisans withdrew from the forest without losses to the Ruska forest. See Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 179.

[399] Reizer, *In the Struggle,* 158.

[400] Ibid., 158.

[401] Testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/555.

Occasionally, farmers who were robbed called on the local authorities such as village heads and police for assistance, which generally resulted in harsh retaliation by the partisans against the farmers. Those found wandering in the forest were presumed to be "spies" and, after interrogation, were summarily executed, as were local authorities.[402] After the German raid on Nacza forest in mid-June 1943, only a few small groups of Jews remained in this area. Allegedly, they were now "terrorized by the newly-created pro-Fascist Polish-Lithuanian gangs, like the 'A.K.,' 'N.S.Z.' and other armed groups."[403] As mentioned ealier, there were no NSZ (National Armed Forces) partisans in the Wilno area and the AK (Home Army) was a Polish national underground that was hunted down by the Germans. The struggle was about something else altogether, which Reizer inadvertently acknowledges: "The [Soviet partisan] unit concentrated all its activity on destroying the pro-Nazi gangs. After a battle near Kowel [Kowalki] several fascists were killed, so the gangs attacked the unit the next day and murdered … a large number of partisans."[404] In his postwar account, Reizer describes this incident somewhat differently: After Jewish partisans seized food supplies in the village of Kowalki, the villagers fought back. The partisans then murdered their "leaders" and some other villagers and burned down their homes, which in turn resulted in more retaliations. The Soviet partisans now had to be on their guard. Reizer paints the following picture resorting to the crudest of black stereotypes borrowed from Stalinist propaganda.

> Our journey was still dangerous. We marched at night and hid during the day because we were surrounded by Polish villages with wealthy [sic] peasants who had watchful eyes, and where the Fascist N.S.Z. and the A.K. were lying in wait.
>
> We added distance and time when we had to crawl across plowed fields and find back roads to avoid meeting well-armed murderers. Most were ex-officers, policemen and other lackeys, rich Polish landowners, who lived in peace with the cruel occupiers who drowned their land in blood.[405]

The demonization of the Home Army does not stop there. Yitzhak Arad, as do other former Jewish partisans, claims that the Home Army "engaged in very little anti-German activity."[406] It has been well documented, however, that Home Army units in the Nowogródek region, who were less numerous and not as well-armed as the Soviet partisans, engaged the Germans in military operations more frequently than the

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[402] Reizer, *In the Struggle,* 159–60, 162; testimony of Miriam Jaszuńska in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 4, 293.

[403] Ibid., 164.

[404] Ibid., 164.

[405] Ibid., 167.

[406] Arad, *The Partisan,* 160.

Soviet partisans (who preferred sabotage and diversionary actions), and were regarded by the Germans as a more formidable foe than the Soviet partisans.[407]

Some of the charges one reads in Jewish memoirs are even more outlandish, and demostrably untrue. One partisan, Peter Smuszkowicz, for example, claims that after the Soviet assault on Burzyński's partisan unit.

> Many Jews lost their lives to these AK [Armia Krajowa] partisans, especially the unit of General Kaminiski [sic]. These were Polish, Belorussian, and Ukrainian collaborators and were actually working for the Germans.[408]

It is trite knowledge that Kaminsky's forces had nothing whatsoever to do with the Home Army. Brigadeführer SS Bronislav Kaminsky (Kaminskii) was the leader of the so-called RONA (*Russkaia Osvoboditelnaia Narodnaia Armiia*–Russian National Liberation Army), a formation of collaborators consisting of Russians, Belorussians, Ukrainians, as well as others, who became infamous for pacification actions in German-occupied Belorussia and during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. Their ranks did not include Poles.[409]

Moreover, what is one to think when one sees crude statements like the following, which show a singular inability to grasp historical reality, pepper the memoirs on which Holocaust history is written?

> The Polish government, in exile in London, was in touch with the AK [Armia Krajowa]. By 1942 the Polish underground in our vicinity were under orders from the Polish government in exile in London to organize in secret, collect weapons, divide into battle-ready squads and wait until it could be determined which side would win the war. If the Germans succeeded on the Russian front, their orders were to join them and declare a free Poland. If the Allies were winning, they would join them instead. … There was no official stance on the fate of Poland's three million Jews. In fact the AK were extremely anti-Semitic. In many parts of Poland they actually participated in the mass executions of Jews.[410]

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[407] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 91. Lieutenant-Colonel Prawdzic-Szlaski lists some 158 military actions by the Home Army directed against the Germans, as opposed to 83 Home Army actions involving Soviet partisans. See Prawdzic-Szlaski, *Nowogródczyzna w walce 1940–1945,* 132–37. Overviews of military operations undertaken by the Polish underground in this region are impressive: Henryk Piskunowicz, "Działalność zbrojna Armii Krajowej na Wileńszczyźnie w latach 1942–1944," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945),* 7–70; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 154, 204, 212, 217–18, 220, 230, 240, 248, 252–53. A Wehrmacht report from April 26, 1944 counted 57 anti-German actions by Polish partisans between March 5 and April 21, 1944. The report considered the "disciplined and solidly trained" Polish units to constitute a "serious peril" and rated their potential much higher than that of the Soviet partisans. Ibid., 35; Litvin, *Akuptsyia Belarusi (1941–1944)*, 152–53.

[408] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 254.

[409] Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust,* 85. Bronislav Kaminskii was born in Vitebsk, now in Belarus. Although he had a Polish father and a German mother, he considered himself a Russian. He enlisted in the Red Army in 1918 as a volunteer.

[410] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 113.

This account is sheer fantasy. The notion that anyone would believe that the Germans contemplated a free Poland under German auspices is simply baffling. The Poles harboured no such illusions. The Polish underground played a pivotal role in transmitting the news of the Holocaust and German military secrets (such as the V-1 and V-2 missiles) to the West, and it was the Polish government in exile that was the first and only government to speak out about the fate of the Jews and to call for punitive measures against the Germans.[411] The Poles' commitment to the Allied cause is beyond question. How can one explain this skewed perspective? Sociologists offer the following caution when assessing the testimony of eyewitnesses:

> Actually, according to current empirical research, memory suffers as a result of traumatic events. Under conditions of great stress people are poorer perceivers, because stress causes a narrowing of attention.[412]

Unfortunately, ideologically charged history which simply ignores hard facts is still prevalent in many circles today. Antony Polonsky, for example, blames the Poles for the conflict that arose between the Home Army and the Soviet partisans in this area, thus seamlessly linking the Jewish ethno-nationalist narrative and the vestiges of Soviet wartime propaganda into one whole:

> In the western parts of [Belarus] the AK was also active. Its attitude to the Soviet partisans and to local Jews was extremely hostile. … Given these attitudes, it is not surprising that the area, after some initial cooperation between the two groups, became the scene of armed conflict between the AK and the Soviet partisans.[413]

This acrimonious debate has witnessed a major breakthrough by a leading Holocaust historian who has attempted to distance himself from ideological polemics. Yisrael Gutman, the director of the Centre of Holocaust Research at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem, acknowledged rather belatedly that the Jewish perspective is not the only valid one in assessing the events in question.

> One should not close one's eyes to the fact that Home Army units in the Wilno area were fighting against the Soviet partisans for the liberation of Poland. And that is why the Jews who found

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[411] Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: The Suppression of the Truth About Hitler's "Final Solution"* (Boston: Little/Brown, 1981), 106, 121, 200–201; Józef Lewandowski, "Gen. Sikorski a Zagłada," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 123 (1998): 226–33.

[412] Guenter Lewy, *The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), 148; based on Elizabeth F. Loftus and James M. Doyle, *Eyewitness Testimony: Civil and Criminal,* 3rd edition (Charlottesville, Virginia: Lexis Publishing, 1997), 21–31.

[413] Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia,* Volume III: *1914 to 2008* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2012), 467. Polonsky goes on to make the usual false charges the Home Army "undertook joint actions" with the Germans against the Soviet partisans.

> themselves on the opposing side perished at the hands of Home Army soldiers—as enemies of Poland, and not as Jews.[414]

However, Israel Gutman's enlightened perspective is not at all popular with academics and the Jewish mainstream. Nechama Tec, as mentioned earlier, alleges that "White Poles were using Jews as shooting targets."[415] A study guide on the Bielski partisans prepared for American students by the Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation offers the same nationalistic perspective. The study guide poses the following questions requiring a textual analysis: "What do you understand about the relationship between the Bielski partisans and the Polish partisans? What evidence do you have from the text to support your understanding?" The only reference in the text to this matter is the following: "There were groups of antisemitic Polish partisans who hunted down and killed Jewish partisans—members of the Polish Home Army, or Army [sic] Krajowa."[416] Indeed, why complicate matters? They are only highly impressionable students, after all.

The portrayal of the Polish Home Army as a "fascist" organization that spent most of its time attacking Jews and Soviet partisans is a propaganda relic of the Stalinist era that should finally be put to rest. Armed confrontations with the more formidable Soviet partisan formations were generally defensive or retaliatory in nature. A radical reappraisal of other matters is also in order. The notion that the Soviet partisans (and by extension Jewish partisans) played a significant role in the defeat of the German forces in the Nowogródek and Wilno regions is a myth that needs to be cast aside once and for all. Official Soviet reports of the exploits of the Soviet partisans, who avoided confrontations with German forces and even large German garrisons (they concentrated their attacks on the local officials and police stations), are thoroughly

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[414] Israel Gutman, "Uczmy się być razem," *Znak* (Kraków), June 2000: 66. Gutman went on to accuse the Home Army of not accepting Jews into their ranks. This charge, however, in no way diminishes Jewish responsibility for taking part in crimes against Polish partisans and the civilian population. It is unfortunate that Gutman's views are not known to Western historians, who continue to rely almost exclusively on Holocaust memoirs for their assessment of Polish-Jewish relations. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum also espouses an uncritical, and unscholarly, appraisal of the activities of Jewish partisans, stressing their singular heroism, to the exclusion of all else, and the vileness of their surroundings. According to Miles Lerman, the former chair of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council: "For some unexplainable reason, the Holocaust literature has failed to espouse sufficiently the heroic deeds of Jewish partisans. … *The record must be set straight once and for all!* This is the reason why the Holocaust Memorial Museum has decided to create the Center for the Study of Jewish Resistance. Our Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies is implementing special research projects, and is organizing scholarly symposiums to document and disseminate these findings throughout the world." See "The Holocaust Museum: What Would You Have Done?" Miles Lerman Lecture, DePaul University, October 7, 1997.

[415] Tec, *Defiance,* 151–53; Nechama Tec, *In the Lion's Den: The Life of Oswald Rufeisen* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1990), 182–83.

[416] Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation, *Tuvia Bielski: Rescue is Resistance*, Study Guide, 2008, Internet: <http://www.jewishpartisans.org/pdfs/Tuvia_Bielski_Study_Guide.pdf>.

exaggerated and unreliable, and need to be subjected to careful scrutiny and verification.[417] In fact, the military accomplishments of the fairly substantial Soviet partisan bases in Naliboki and Rudniki forests were rather modest. As pointed out by Russian historian Boris Sokolov, not a single Wehrmacht operational transport was stopped as a result of partisan activities, nor was a single large German offensive hindered.[418]

According to research conducted by historian Bogdan Musiał,

> According to that [standard Soviet] narrative, the Soviet partisans killed 1.5 million "Germans and their collaborators." In reality, the casualties inflicted on the enemy did not exceed 45,000, half of them Germans. As Musial puts it, "The higher the position of the official submitting the report, the higher the enemy losses reported."

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[417] Historian Alexander Statiev contends that Soviet partisans "inflated their success to a degree that makes most numbers in their reports useless for researchers." He notes, in particular, that the Central Partisan Headquarters claimed to have killed 303,950 enemy soldiers and 9,291 policemen, and wounded 79,168 enemy soldiers between April 17, 1943 and January 13, 1944 alone, "which is a blatant lie." See Alexander Statiev, "The Soviet Union," in Cooke and Shepherd, *European Resistance in the Second World War,* 208. According to the Belorussian staff of the partisan movement, in the course of the war, Soviet partisans killed 27,977 and wounded 8,232 native policemen, a figure that is obviously grossly inflated, but still passed off as genuine by many Belarussian historians. See K.I. Kozak, "Germanskie okkupatsionnye voennye i grazhdanskie organy v Belarusi 1941–1944 gg.: Analiz i itogi poter," in Balakirau and Kozak, *Pershaia i druhaia sysvetnyia voiny,* 139. Belorussian historian Aliaksei Litvin, a researcher at the Institute of the History of the (Communist) Party in Minsk, exposed some of the highly inflated claims about the Soviet partisan movement made by Ponomarenko and others, which are characteristic of Soviet historiography, and challenged the long-held claim of near universal support for the Communist underground among the Belorussian population. He also lent credence to the contention of Polish historians that the Soviet side was never interested in reaching a compromise with the Poles. See Aliaksei Litvin, *Akupatsyia Belarusi (1941–1944): Pytanni supratsivu i kalabaratsyi* (Minsk: Belaruski knihazbor, 2000). A case in point are the reports regarding the May 1943 massacre in Naliboki, referred to earlier, which turned that blood bath of civilians into a military action that yielded large quantities of weapons. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 89. Another example can be found in Eugeniusz Iwaniec, "Napad sowieckiej partyzantki na Kosów Poleski 3 sierpnia 1942 r. (sukces czy klęska?)", *Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne,* vol. 25 (2006): 259–97. The author also notes the wanton destruction of the school and hospital during the Soviet assault on the German garrison in this small town, with its deleterious impact on the welfare of the local population. For examples of "embellished" accounts from other parts of Poland see Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 234; and Zbigniew Romaniuk, "Brańsk and Its Environs in the Years 1939–1953: Reminiscences of Events," in *The Story of Two Shtetls,* Part One, 85. The same holds true for the alleged accomplishments of the Soviet partisans in Lithuania. See Rimantas Zizas, *Sovietiniai partizanai Lietuvoje 1941–1944* (Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2014).

Even some Jewish sources concede that Soviet partisan combat activities and heroism (and by necessary extension, those of Jews) have been greatly exaggerated. See Tec, *Defiance,* 83, 225; Nechama Tec, "Jewish Resistance in Belorussian Forests: Fighting and the Rescue of Jews by Jews," in Ruby Rohrlich, ed., *Resisting the Holocaust* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1998), 79. For example, the casualty toll for an assault on the Lida-Baranowicze railroad on January 5, 1944, which allegedly took the lives of two Germans and injured 13, was later inflated by Russian partisans to 21 Germans killed, and by Zus Bielski to 50 Germans killed. The commanders of both the Russian and Jewish detachments that participated in the sabotage were presented with awards by the commander of the Kirov Brigade. See Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 230. Without checking German records, however, we cannot be sure exactly how many casualties there were as a result of that operation. Generally, there is a lack of confirmation in the meticulous field reports prepared by the Germans, as well as in other sources, of many of the accomplishments claimed by Soviet partisans, for example, those of the Markov Brigade. See Jarosław Wołkonowski, "Zdrada nad Naroczą," *Karta* (Warsaw), no. 13 (1995): 138. One Jewish partisan noted: "Toward the end of the war, when we were leaving the partisans, the Russians were distributing titles, medals, and orders, even the highest kind of distinctions. Some of those could be bought with vodka. Also, whoever had good connections could count on receiving a medal." See Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 202. Documents in the Belorussian archives in Minsk disclose that Jewish partisans were known to have paid their Soviet colleagues large quantities of gold jewelry (wedding bands, earrings, and crosses stolen from civilians) to "appropriate" Soviet military operations. When Soviet partisans in the field turned to headquarters for permission to do so, they were advised to up the ante.

[418] Sokolov, *Okkupatsiia,* 104. For a well-documented reassessment of the Soviet partisans' "railroad war" see Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944,* 220–30.

> In the meantime, the Soviet partisan commanders deluged Moscow with "euphoric reports about their military successes which did not reflect reality." Regarding the German antipartisan pacification action "Hermann" in the Naliboki Forest undertaken between 13 July and 8 August 1943, the communist partisan leader reported the annihilation of the staff and the commanding officer of the infamous SS-Dirlewanger Sonderbrigade, and boasted of "3,000 killed and wounded enemies, 29 POWs taken, 60 destroyed enemy vehicles, 3 tanks and 4 armored cars taken over." The Soviet losses were put at "129 killed, 50 wounded, and 24 missing." In reality, Dirlewanger died after the war and his staff escaped unscathed. The German casualty rolls show 52 killed, 155 wounded, and 4 missing. On the other hand, the Nazis reported 4,280 killed and 654 captured "bandits." Among the combat casualties, in addition to Soviet guerrillas, there were also Polish independent Home Army partisans. However, most of the losses consisted of civilian Poles and Belarusans [sic], including the denizens of Naliboki which was completely obliterated by the Nazis. Hundreds of inhabitants were shot, several hundred were deported to slave labor in the Reich, and only a few managed to flee.[419]

Soviet partisan attacks on German military and police targets were exceptional. They preferred to assault the poorly armed and trained Belorussian auxiliaries and local self-defence forces. According to a German historian,

> The partisans did not carve out "partisan republics" in the German rear; they created "twilight zones," where neither the Germans nor the Soviet partisans were fully in control. Although the partisans were growing in strength, direct attacks on German troops remained rare. Instead the partisans targeted Soviet citizens regarded as collaborators. The partisan war in Belarus also seems to have had an element of class warfare, which was evident in the attacks on estate owners in the territories of the interwar Polish state that the Soviets had annexed in 1939. These were soft targets, and they were available in large numbers. … [by August 1942, according to German reports] the partisans had killed some 1500 town mayors. …
>
> Such incidents point to a reality that diverges from the official history of Soviet partisans during the Second World War. Soviet historians claimed that the partisans were the defenders and avengers of the local population, which willingly provided the partisans with food and clothing and sheltered them when needed. German documents, by sharp contrast, portrayed the partisans as fanatical NKVD agents, bandits, and looters who created only resentment among the civilian population. In fact, the partisans' relations with civilians varied according to geographic origins of the units, operational circumstances, objectives, and orders from on high. The staff of the TsShPD [*Tsentralnyi shtab partizanskogo dvizheniia*—Central Staff of the Partisan Movement] understood that partisan violence against civilians was more or less widespread and tried to contain it. As

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[419] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 22, 107–108, and Marek J. Chodakiewicz's review in *Sarmatian Review,* no. 2 (April) 2006: 1217–20. See also Bogdan Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1941: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009); Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde,* 865–66 (Mogilev oblast). The Soviet historiography on the occupation in Ukraine is similarly marred and reported German losses are often grossly inflated. See Aleksander Gogun, "Stalinowska wojna partyzancka na Ukrainie 1941–1944," Part Two, *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość,* vol. 11 (2007), no. 2: 129, 133.

> discipline improved over the course of 1942 and 1943, such violence declined, bit it did not disappear. [The extent of improvement, as testimonies show, is highly debatable.—*M.P.*] …
>
> Starting in 1943, partisan operations were increasingly directed at German supply lines and transport. Some actions were spectacular but of little operational significance. … In the final stage of the German occupation, in 1944, the partisans became a military force. … On the eve of the Soviet offensive (Operation Bagration), partisans detonated almost 10,500 charges, cutting the German lines for days.[420]

Until 1944, the guerrillas torched and levelled Polish landed estates much more frequently than they blew up military transports or assaulted other hard targets. In fact, "by the end of 1943, most large landed estates had been destroyed."[421] As Leo Heiman, a member of the Rokossovsky Brigade and later an intelligence officer in the Israeli army, candidly admitted:

> But our impact as guerrillas was insignificant. We killed Nazi policemen, cut telephone and telegraph wires, hanged German-appointed village headmen and pro-Nazi collaborators, burned a few wooden trestle bridges, and ambushed a few police vehicles on the roads. These local pinpricks gave us a good feeling, boosted our prestige with the local populace, and made the Germans angry. But they did not influence the outcome of decisive Eastern Front campaigns, did not harm the Nazi war machine, and did not contribute to the ultimate German defeat in the Soviet Union.[422]

Rather, "the cornerstone of partisan logistics and the very basis of guerrilla operations" was the large-scale looting of the civilian population. This looting, which is discussed in depth later on, was not merely widespread but consisted of "organized looting, estortion, and pillage."[423] Likewise, there is no basis on which to dispute the assessment of Raul Hilberg, one of the foremost scholars of the Holocaust, that the Germans "did not suffer much from Jewish resistance."[424]

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[420] Timm C. Richter, "Belarusian Partisans and German reprisals," in Snyder and Brandon, *Stalin and Europe,* 212–13.

[421] Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 106.

[422] Leo Heiman, "Organized Looting: The Basis of Partisan Warfare," *Military Review* (February 1965): 61–68, at pp. 62–63. See also Leo Heiman's memoir, *I Was a Soviet Guerrilla* (London: Brown, Watson, 1959).

[423] Heiman, "Organized Looting: The Basis of Partisan Warfare," *Military Review* (February 1965): 62.

[424] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews,* Third edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), vol. 2, 545

8. German Raids, the Soviet Peril, and Inhospitable Jews

German punitive operations of various descriptions—blockades, pacifications, sweeps, manhunts, raids (or *oblava* in Russian)—directed against partisans and Jewish fugitives living in the forests were undoubtedly the single largest cause of losses among Jews who escaped from the ghettos of northeastern Poland.[425] Numerous Jewish accounts attest to the fact that thousands of Jews perished in these operations.

Of the 800 to 1,000 Jews from Byteń, Kosów and other towns in the area of Słonim who were in family camps in the Wilcze Nory forests, only about about 50 survived the manhunts.[426] Several hundred Jews escaped to the forests from Byteń in August and September 1942 and organized themselves into a family camp. One of the escapees recalled the impact of a ten-day German siege on her family camp in September 1942, following the evacuation of the Shchors Brigade from the area:

> In that attack on our Wolcze Nory [Wilcze Nory—"Wolf Caves"] woods, losses were depressingly heavy. From our Jewish group alone, only 170 survived out of 370. Small disorganized remnants of the group were scattered throughout the woods.[427]

Following another German raid in December 1942, after Soviet partisans had expelled the Jews from the forest, only 70 Jews of that group remained alive.[428] Yet another German raid in that same area took 24 Jewish lives in March 1944; a further four Jews were taken prisoner by the Germans and executed.[429] The non-Jews in that area did not fair much better:

> In a short while we reached the village of Volchy Nury [Wilcze Nory], nestling in the forest. Before the massive manhunt, the population there numbered a few hundred. The first partisans who reached it in their flight from the Germans had found refuge and safety there. The villagers gave the fleeing fighters hospitality, provided food, and directed them on to the small handfuls of partisans who had settled deeper in the forest. …
>
> In the early days of the widespread manhunt, yet before the Germans came into the forests in force, they overwhelmed the villages around us and cut them off from us. …

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[425] Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 43–45; Wardzyńska, "Radziecki ruch partyzancki i jego zwalczanie w Generalnym Komisariacie Białorusi," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość: Biuletyn Głównej Komisji Badania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu–Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej,* no. 39 (1996): 46–50. On the activities of the German police in Belorussia see Wolfgang Curilla, *Die Deutsche Ordnungspolizei und der Holocaust im Baltikum und in Weißrußland, 1941–1944* (Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006).

[426] Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,* 512; Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 311–12.

[427] Bryna Bar Oni, *The Vapor* (Chicago: Visual Impact, 1976), 73. According to other sources this raid resulted in the family camp dwindling from 360 to 150 people or from 300 to 100. Many villages were also laid waste and houses were burned down along with their inhabitants. See Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 342–45; Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,* 511.

[428] Bar Oni, *The Vapor,* 85, 90; Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 353–54.

[429] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 356.

> Along with other villages, the German armed forces had barged into Volchy Nury too, and made a shambles of it. They were vicious. A few hours after entering the village, they rounded up all the people and chose a large number of the men to dig large pits at the end of the village. There they threw in men, women, and children—the greater part of the village population—whom they massacred; and before they left, the Germans set the whole village on fire. Not one house was left standing.[430]

The extent of the devastation wreaked by German forces is described in a number of German military reports:

> During the winter of 1942–43 several German units gathered to attack the partisans south of Slonim [Słonim]. The final report of the action, which deemed it a success, stated that 1,676 "bandits," 1,510 "sympathizers," 2,658 Jews, and 30 Roma ("Gypsies") were killed. "Bandit" was the German term for partisan. Since the troops were unable or did not take the time to establish during the fight which partisans were Jews, many of these were also Jews. The figure of 2,658 Jews refers to civilians, who must have been from the family camps. Most of these had probably escaped earlier from Slonim. "Sympathizers" indicates those Belorussian peasants who the Germans thought supported the partisans. …
>
> A considerable part of the partisan units, however, succeeded in breaking through toward the south in the direction of Byten/Kosov [Byteń/Kosów]. The Germans therefore followed with a second "action." Retreating, the partisans lost 97 fighting men. The German troops shot 785 Belorussian civilians considered to have helped the partisans, another 126 civilian Jews who did not succeed in evacuating to the south far enough, and another group of 24 Roma.[431]

About 120 Jews who had escaped from Dereczyn were killed when their camp was surrounded and attacked by the Germans.[432] After a partisan attack on the town of Dereczyn on August 10, 1942, a large German force conducted a manhunt in Lipiczany forest in which more than 100 Jews were killed.[433] Another manhunt began on December 10, 1942 and lasted about two weeks (Operation Hamburg). Dozens of Jewish partisans were killed, including Dr. Yehezkel (Jechiel) Atlas and Hirsh Kaplinsky, the commanders of the two Jewish units in Lipiczany forest. German reports claimed that more than 6,000 people were killed in the operation, at least half of whom were said to be Jews. Very few Jews survived in

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[430] Yechiel Granatstein, *The War of a Jewish Partisan: A Youth Imperiled By His Russian Comrades and Nazi Conquerors* (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1986), 171.

[431] Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Destruction and Resistance: The Jewish Shtetl of Slonim, 1941–44," in Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch, eds., *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 45.

[432] *Dereczin* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Jacob Solomon Berger, 2000), 304.

[433] Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,* 509. See also the account of Hertsl Traetsky in Vladimir Levin and David Meltser, *Chernaia kniga z krasnymi stranitsami: Tragediia i geroizm evreev Belorussii* (Baltimore: Vestnik Information Agency, 1996), 306.

the family camps in Lipiczany forest after this manhunt.[434] Harold Zissman (Hersh Cukierman) describes the raids as follows:

> The winter of 1942–1943 was bitterly, viciously cold. The snows came in early November. The Germans assembled a great force and attacked the Lipitchanian [Lipiczny] Forest, driving us out of our shelters. Later we would recall this winter as the Bog Blockade of 1942. On the first day of it, the Nazis engaged us along the banks of the Shchara [Szczara], intent on flushing us out of the woods and into the open. … We took heavy casualties …
>
> When daylight came, a strong new force attacked our rear and advanced into the woods. It was there that Dr. Atlas was killed while giving first aid to his injured men.
>
> The Nazis razed the towns of Slizy Podgrobelskie, Volia [Wola], Ostrova [Ostrów], and Ruda Lipitchanskaia [Ruda Lipiczańska]. The livestock was herded away, and anyone not fleeing into the woods was killed. … On the third day, the Germans had the upper hand and reached into the forests to yank us out. They cut our defenses to pieces … From that point on, it was each company for itself.[435]

According to a Jewish survivor from Bielica near Zdzięcioł, "It was during the big hunt that approximately 75 percent of the Jews living in the forest perished."[436]

Of the Jews who broke out during the liquidation of the ghetto in Iwie (Iwje) at the end of December 1942, many were soon killed as a result of concerted German attacks on the nearby hamlets. Several dozen fugitives from Iwie and Traby were killed in Operation Hermann, the massive German anti-partisan blockade of July and August 1943 in Naliboki forest described earlier.[437] Many of the Jews who escaped to the forests from the labour camp in Wilejka in the fall of 1942 were killed in the first German blockade, despite being warned of the raid by a Christian underground contact. The Jews wounded in that raid received very little assistance from the Soviet partisans they encountered.[438]

Yitzhak Zimerman recalled the numerous Jewish victims (approximately 30) of both the first and second German blockades, the latter on April 30, 1943. The following year, around Passover, another German

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[434] Arad, *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union,* 509.

[435] Zissman, *The Warriors,* 123–24.

[436] Philip Lazowski, *Faith and Destiny* (Barkhamsted, Connnecticut: Goulet Printery, 2006), 123.

[437] Account of Meyshe Kaganovitsh in M. [Moshe] Kaganovich, ed., *In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ivye,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/ivye/>; translation of *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Ivye* (Tel Aviv: Association of Former Residents of Ivie in Israel and United Ivier Relief in America, 1968).

[438] Account of Shimon Zimmerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

blockade resulted in the loss of an additional 15 Jews from Kurzeniec.[439] Shalom Yoran, an escapee from the ghetto in Kurzeniec, recounts that in the winter and spring of 1943:

> Most of the villages, including those we had asked about, had been totally burnt. Many of the men were killed, and the rest taken to work camps in Germany. The roundups in the puszcza [forest] which we had left took several weeks and, as far as he knew, most of the Jews were discovered and killed. …
>
> German military units had surrounded the forest and then entered with sleds and horses. … Systematically, they combed the area and shot any Jew they came upon. There were no partisans in the woods at that time. Of the hundred and fifty Jews hiding there, less than fifty managed to escape. This was similar to what happened in other parts of the forest. The survivors broke up into small groups and spread out. …
>
> Although the partisans were the Germans' main target in the oblava, Jews were an added bonus; all Jews found in hiding were shot on the spot. …
>
> Shortly thereafter, unfortunately, a new oblava began at the puszcza. The small group of partisans that were near there had disappeared, so the only people in the forest were Jews, most of whom were caught and killed.[440]

In the early part of 1943, the heavily Jewish Frunze Brigade was attacked by SS squads: "We scattered in confusion. Many of our partisans were killed. The Frunze brigade fell apart."[441] A blockade in Nacza forest carried out by the Germans and Lithuanian auxiliaries in June or July of 1943 resulted in heavy losses for Jewish fugitives hiding in the forest.[442] According to Jewish sources, "most of those in the family camp (ninety-six in number) were killed."[443] A German blockade in the vicinity of Lake Narocz toward the end of September 1943 also resulted in heavy losses for the Jewish partisans whom the Soviet partisans had disarmed and abandoned, and especially among non-partisans.

> The disbandment of Mestj [*Mest'*—"Revenge" or "Vengeance," a Jewish partisan unit in Markov's Voroshilov Brigade] was accomplished several days before the great German hunt through the

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[439] Account of Yitzhak Zimerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

[440] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 122, 124, 125.

[441] Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto,* 124.

[442] Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 220–30; Reizer, *In the Struggle,* 163. According to one source, the raid—a 16-day assault which started on June 16, 1943—took the lives of 70 Jews from the "Todras" family camp alone. See Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 638. Leib Reizer states that, in retaliation, Jewish partisans blew up a German military train at the Tsherlana or Czerliny [Czerlona?] train station near Łunna, destroying 12 Tiger tanks and more than 20 Ferdinands, and killing about 100 Germans. See Reizer, *In the Struggle,* 163–64; Testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/555. This claim, which appears to be grossly inflated, cannot be verified.

[443] Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 179, which places the raid in July 1943.

Narocz forests. The partisan command learned of the concentration of the German forces and decided not to enter into combat with the numerically superior enemy, but to withdraw from the threatened zone before the Germans cordoned it of. This was the customary partisan tactic in the face of superior enemy forces. The withdrawal was directed toward the Koziany forests.

The siege came as a heavy blow to the Mestj combatants, whose unit had been dissolved and were as yet unable to re-organize. The F.P.O. [members of the Jewish underground who had escaped from Wilno—*M.P.*], who were newcomers to the forests and still insufficiently acquainted with the conditions and the locality, suffered greatly. About 200 Jews from the "maintenance" personnel and other Jews of the family camps gathered in the vicinity of the Komsomolski camp and beseeched its Russian commander to take them along, and not leave them to the mercy of the Germans. He refused, and even fired warning shots to frighten those who tried to follow the tracks of the unit. …

The Jewish partisans and families who remained in the Narocz forests found refuge in the marshy area, which the Germans found difficult to comb thoroughly. Yet, approximately 130 Jews were killed in the German siege.[444]

The situation of the Jews, and particularly of the nonfighters, deteriorated even more when, after a few days [late September 1943], the partisans began to retreat from the forest in expectation of the [German] siege. … Shaulevich, the commander of the Komsomolski detatchment, permitted only Byelorussian partisans and Jews whose weapons had not yet been confiscated to join him when he retreated. By his order, unarmed Jews who tried to follow him were fired upon. The Jewish members of the professional company formed from the "Revenge" unit were ordered to carry stretchers with the wounded to a certain place and to stay there unarmed; some two hundred Jews were thus forsaken. Despite desperate attempts to hide in the marshes and the depths of the forest, more than half of them, including [Josef] Glazman and his group, perished during the seven-day siege. … Even when the siege ended and the detachments returned to their bases, not all the Jews were accepted by partisan units.[445]

The circumstances of the disbanding of "Revenge" (or "Vengeance"), a Jewish unit that existed for about two months (from its creation at the beginning of August 1943) within the Markov's Voroshilov Brigade, raises issues of anti-Semitism within the Soviet partisan movement, which will be discussed more fully later. The consequences for the Jewish partisans were described by a number of partisans: their weapons and valuables were seized by the Soviets and the Jewish partisans were left to fend for themselves. As already mentioned, most of them soon perished.

Nissan headed the second group to leave [Wilno] for the forest of Naroch [sic] (Belarus). …

In the forest they were received with hostility. A short time after their arrival in the forest the Jewish unit was disbanded, the weapons which they had collected through great hardship and

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[444] Arad, *Ghetto in Flames,* 452–53.

[445] Levin, *Fighting Back,* 185.

danger, and had brought with them into the forest, were confiscated, and the Russian Partisan Units under Markov refused to accept the Jews to [sic] their ranks.[446]

Our otriad successfully accomplished many missions. But being a Jewish otriad, we encountered anti-Semitism from the other units. There were incidents when our partisans were attacked by members of other otriads, who tried to forcibly take away our weapons. They believed that since Jews didn't know how to fight anyway, we should give our arms to them. …

Finally, Colonel Markov had to dismantle the Jewish otriad when he got instructions from the political head of the Bieloruss [Belorussian] Communist Party. The explanation was that a separate Jewish otriad increased anti-Semitism, plus Jews were not officially recognized as an ethnic entity in the Soviet Union. …

Markov told us that he had decided to merge our otriad with a non-Jewish one. The new name would be Komsomolski otriad. Our new commander was Volodka [Shaulevich]. … The Belorussian partisans were given all of the command positions. …

The commander of each otriad had absolute power over his people. …

An episode that took place in our new otriad several days later reconfirmed this absolute power. A Belorussian in charge of the guards accused two Jewish partisans of dozing while on sentry duty. They were immediately arrested … and they were brought on trial before Commander Volodka. They denied the charge, but of course Volodka believed the sentry commander. They were sentenced to death and within ten minutes they were shot.

A week later Volodka ordered everybody, which really meant the Jews, to turn in all their valuables, such as gold, watches, and money, so that he could buy more weapons for the otriad. We were called to his headquarters one by one and had to enter unarmed. There, under the watchful eye of Volodka and to the accompaniment of verbal anti-Semitic attacks, we were searched and stripped of anything that was considered of any value. …

Since anti-Semitism was definitely a political matter, we complained to the commissar about this disgraceful behavior. He just laughed …

The Jews never got the promised arms, and the valuables went to Volodka and his gang, of which the commissar was a part.

Several days later Volodka issued an order that all those with handguns, meaning the Jews from Vilna who had recently arrived, were to turn in their arms at his headquarters. In return they would get rifles. We advised them not to believe Volodka's promises. Some of them listened and hid their guns. The rest gave in their handguns and got nothing in return.[447]

One day … an order came from Staff-Officer Wolodka Szaulewicz [Volodka Shaulevich], that at an appointed hour, all the new partisans should report to the bunker house where the recently organized Jewish Staff was to be found. The Jewish partisans were very quick to notice that a heavily armed partisan group stood on guard at the entrance.

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[446] Account of Nissan Reznik in Boneh, *History of the Jews of Pinsk,* Part Two, Chapter 6.

[447] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 144–46.

> One after another they went into the bunker and soon came out of it, without loitering a moment to talk to the others in line who were waiting to enter. They were told one by one that they were to penetrate further into the forest.
>
> Everyone understood that something was going on, but nobody knew exactly what it was. It was only when they entered the bunker that they saw a table laden with all kinds of watches, money and other valuables. Szaulewicz greeted each man with the directive that he had to contribute something to the defense fund of the Soviet Union—anything of value he had brought along. Each had to sign a paper that he had given his valuables voluntarily.
>
> All this would have been acceptable, if Szaulewicz had not led a group of strong-armed men the next day and surrounded the unarmed Jewish partisans, forcing them at gunpoint to take off their good boots, leather jackets, and hand them over to his men. When the Jewish partisans began to grumble and complain to Markov, they were met with a cold shoulder.[448]

> On September 23, 1943, the Jewish unit was summoned, and Markov announced that Vengeance [Revenge] was to be disbanded. … After this announcement the weapons were taken from the overwhelming majority of the unit's men, and the few left with arms were transferred to the Komsomolski Company. …
>
> Vengeance was disbanded a few days before a great German blockade of the Naroch [Narocz] Woods. The partisans began to leave the area before the Germans closed in. Some 200 of those who had been in Vengeance … tried to leave with the Komsomolski Company, which was armed in part with the weapons that had belonged to them. They asked Shaulvitz [Shaulevich], the commander, to take them with him, but he refused, and when they tried to follow, warning shots were fired above their heads. … More than 100 Jews from the family camps died then at the hands of the Germans … [Josef] Glazman too fell during the hunt, together with thirty-five Jewish partisans who joined [Henoch] Ziman's Lithuanian unit when Vengeance was disbanded. They were killed on their way from Naroch to Kozyany [Koziany].
>
> Moshe [Shutan] drew a harrowing picture of the fate of the Jews in the Naroch Woods, of the severe difficulties after the hunt, and of the ways in which some of the Soviet partisans molested the Jews who survived the German search.[449]

A blockade in the vicinity of Lake Narocz resulted in heavy losses among non-partisans left to fend for themselves:

> The regular, well-armed partisans evacuated the forest shortly before the aggressors gathered their forces to comb the forest. The masses of Jews who did not belong to any comabt unit suffered casualties. They were open to attack. Seventy were killed.[450]

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[448] Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 268–69.

[449] Arad, *The Partisan,* 149–50.

[450] Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 275.

A blockade in the area of Koziany forest, to the north of Lake Narocz, in October 1943 was equally devastating, and not only for the Jews:

> The devastation left by the Germans was inconceivable. Many Jews were killed by the Nazis. A large number of them had come to our forest from Narocz seeking to escape a blockade of their forest and instead walked into a terrible trap. Villages as far as 20 kilometres from the forest fell before the German onslaught. Homes where Jewish men and women had been hidden by the Gentile population were burned, with their occupants still alive inside.[451]

But the Germans were not the only source of large-scale Jewish losses. Although ostensibly acting as would-be protectors of the Jews who fled to the forests, as Jewish memoirs attest, Soviet partisans often robbed and killed Jewish fugitives. Historian Yehuda Bauer writes:

> the first Soviet detachments were formed in August 1941. Most of the so-called partisans were … escaped POWs, soldiers who had been cut off from their units, and they easily turned into bandits who killed and robbed to survive. Jews escaping into the forests often met with these bands, and if they were lucky, they were disarmed, their possessions, usually their boots to start with, were taken from them, and they were abandoned. If they were not lucky, they were killed. In many cases, those who survived their encounter with bandits had to return to the ghetto. They had no alternative. This discouraged those in the ghetto who planned any kind of resistance. …
>
> The policy of Soviet partisan units regarding Jews differed from one unit to the other. In most cases, they rejected unarmed Jews and left them to fend for themselves; bandits killed many of these Jews. Soviet units also killed Jews, partly to acquire their possessions, partly to get rid of unwanted witnesses, and partly to eliminate competition for the little food the peasants on the edge of the forests could supply. Many former Red Army soldiers, Russians and others, turned out to be extremely anti-Semitic.[452]

According to Jewish historian A. Zvie Bar-On,

> It is a proven fact that dozens and perhaps hundreds of Jewish partisans and their families were murdered by non-Jewish partisans [from the Soviet partisan forces], generally covertly by a treacherous bullet in the back, in circumstances that enabled the murderers to deny without difficulty either the deed itself or its deliberate intention. In many cases murder was accompanied by robbery, rape and savage malhandling [sic]. These acts were especially frequent at the beginning of the partisan movement when the link with the centre was slight and discipline in the units of a low order. But acts of murder also occurred at a later period.[453]

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[451] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 191.

[452] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 127, 129.

[453] Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 102. See also the findings of Israeli historian Shmuel Krakowski, cited in Gilbert, *The Holocaust,* 464.

Nechama Tec, another author who has chronicled the Jewish partisan movement in this area, describes the fate of many Jews who tried to hide in the countryside or forests after escaping from the ghettos.

> Largely because of who they were, the Jewish ghetto runaways, more than others, were at the mercy of partisan groups that, instead of fighting the enemy, robbed each other of anything they considered of value. Rivalry and greed sometimes led to murder. Caught in these conflicts, some of the Jews were robbed and killed. Others were stripped of their meager belongings and chased away. Only some, usually young men with guns, were welcomed into partisan units.[454]
>
> Lipiczańska forest [near Lipiczany] became home for both Jewish and Russian partisans. It also became a haven for ghetto runaways, many of whom were older people, women, and children. Small family clusters or units of unattached fugitives were scattered all over this forest. Disorganized and unprotected, these groups lived in primitive bunkers. … Unaccustomed to life in the forest, many fugitives were attacked by unruly partisan bands and robbed of their meager belongings and some were murdered in the process. …
>
> A survivor of a family camp tells how Russian partisans robbed them of their few weapons. For them, no arms meant no food. … Only a fraction survived.[455]
>
> One day [Hersh] Smolar [one of the underground leaders in the Minsk ghetto turned partisan] received an unexpected visit from Tevel, a one-time rabbinical student, a brave partisan, and a personal adjunct to a respected head of a Soviet brigade. [Tevye Shimanovich was an aide-de-camp of the Zhukov Brigade.] … I heard we were going to Niemen (a major river). … Scattered on the ground were bodies of young women who were clearly Jewish. …
>
> And Smolar did the following: "I went to our headquarters and I made a big fuss. I told them that our people [i.e., Soviet partisans of a neighbouring detachment] had murdered the Jewish women. I demanded justice. To this the commander, who was sent to us from Moscow, said that after all this was war and we have received a notice that the Germans were sending Jewish women to poison our food kettles. This was an excuse for the killings. Nothing changed."[456]
>
> Luba Rudnicki, young and just married, escaped from Nowogródek ghetto in the fall of 1942 to the countryside where together with her husband, Janek Rudnicki, and three more ghetto fugitives she was protected by Poles. The group was treacherously attacked by Russian partisans. Two were killed, and the rest ran away to the forest and joined the Bielski otriad.[457]

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[454] Nechama Tec, "Partisan Interconnections in Belorussian Forests and the Rescue of Jews by Jews," in John J. Michalczyk, ed., *Resisters, Rescuers, and Refugees: Historical and Ethical Issues* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 120.

[455] Tec, *Defiance,* 81.

[456] Ibid., 154–55.

[457] Ibid., 264.

Historian Timothy Snyder provides the following observations on the fate of Jews who ventured out into the forests to join the Soviet partisans:

> Yet partisans did not necessarily welcome Jews. Partisan units were meant to defeat the German occupation, not to help civilians endure it. Jews who lacked arms were often turned away, as were women and children. Even armed Jewish men were sometimes rejected or even, in some cases, killed for their weapons. Partisan leaders feared that Jews from ghettos were German spies, an accusation that was not as absurd as it might appear. The Germans would indeed seize wives and children, and then tell Jewish husbands to go to the forest and return with information if they wished to see their families again.[458]

Historian Kenneth Slepyan takes a rather benign view of the motivation of the Soviet partisans:

> Suspicions among the partisans ran high; outsiders were not to be trusted. … Partly because of this exclusivity, few non-party Jewish civilians joined, or were permitted to join, the [partisan] movement in 1941. In the atmosphere of fear and suspicion that prevailed in the occupied territories, it was almost impossible for Jews, as outsiders, to enter units unless they were known personally to the partisans, just as it was unlikely that other outsiders, too, would be accepted. … partisans were frequently very suspicious of Jews—or of people who claimed to be Jews—under the logic that a spy would invent precisely such an identity. … Under interrogation, some Jewish partisans even confessed—or were forced to confess—to working for the Germans. … Indeed, even Soviet Jewish partisans executed fellow Jews whom they believed to be German spies.[459]

Jewish memoirs also confirm the pervasive fear of "spies" dispatched by the Germans to the forests:

> We moved from place to place in the forest a few times because of the increase in the number of spies and patrols sent by the Germans and local police from Kosov [Kosów], Rozheny [Różana], Iwatzvitzi [Iwacewicze], and other places. Many of them were caught, confessed and were executed. They were brought to us blindfolded and their hands tied by the secret service, which operated 10-15 kilometers from our base [i.e., the Kirov otriad]. During the siege and search operations of the Germans and their accomplices, we didn't have time to file and prosecute the spies and patrols that we caught. Unfortunately, these were the "laws" at the time in the forest.[460]

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[458] Snyder, *Bloodlands,* 237.

[459] Kenneth Slepyan, "The Soviet Partisan Movement and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 5.

[460] Berestizki, *Run For Your Life, My Child!,* 92–93. The author confirms that supply raids into villages, revenge actions against informers, and killing captured German and allied soldiers were routine. Ibid., 93, 113, 116.

> The Germans would send the partisans young women who had dangerous STDs to infect them. In our camp, three such women who admitted they were sent by the Germans, were executed.[461]

Joseph Kuszelewicz, who joined the Bielski partisans, confirms the belief that there were German spies among the Jews who came to the forest:

> There were some executions of Jewish informers infiltrated into the Bielski group by the Germans in order to betray it. … In most cases, these traitors were quickly uncovered and executed after a rapid and merciless sentence.[462]

A report submitted by Tuvia Bielski to the Soviet command on the activities of his detachment acknowledges this in a less explicit manner:

> Every citizen who came to the disposition of the detachment by chance or intentionally was interrogated by the Plenipotentiary of the Special Department, and there were occasions when the Germans would send in spies who pretended being partisans.[463]

Slepyan also acknowledges that

> a high percentage of Jews seeking refuge in the forest were murdered by [Soviet] partisans. A group of Jewish women was killed by a partisan band just after having crossed the Nieman [Niemen] River into the supposed safety of partisan territory. Such actions were commonly tolerated by mid-level Soviet officials, who rationalized that such things happen in wartime. … another partisan commander, Astreiko, … before becoming a partisan had been the head of a local police unit that had allegedly executed 300 Jews. Jews thus faced a difficult struggle to join the movement, and even able-bodied Jews were frequently turned away. … Some hid their Jewish identity altogether in order to join or because they feared their comrades' prejudices. Even after being allowed into units … their acceptance was sometimes only grudging.[464]

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[461] Shulamit Fuchs, "I Was Left Alone and Isolated," in David Shtokfish, ed., *Sefer Divenishok: Yad vashem le-ayara yehudit* (Israel: Divenishok Societies in Israel and the United States, 1977), 194 ff.; translated as *Devenishki Book: Memorial Book,* Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/dieveniskes/dieveniskes.html>. Fuchs, who joined the Orliani unit, states: "One day, all the Jews in the *otriad* were gathered and were told the *otriad* had received special combat [orders] demanding much effort, so all the Jews are being expelled. Their weapons were confiscated and they were told to go wherever their eyes would take them."

[462] Kuszelewicz, *Un Juif de Biélorussie de Lida à Karaganda,* 83–84.

[463] Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 236. This passage was omitted from the report reproduced in volume 23 of *Yad Vashem Studies* (1993); it should have appeared before the last paragraph on page 407. For similar accounts from the Nacza forest area, see the testimony of Abraham Asner, October 10, 1982, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan at Dearborn, Internet: <http://holocaust.umd.umich.edu/asner/>, section 56 (Spies).

[464] Kenneth Slepyan, "The Soviet Partisan Movement and the Holocaust," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* vol. 14, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 7. See also Slepyan, *Stalin's Guerrillas,* 209.

Grainom Lazewnik, who hails from Łunin, in Polesie, and narrowly escaped being shot by Soviet partisans, confirms that information based on his personal experience:

> We met a few groups of [Soviet] partisans but they were not willing to have us. Some were anti-semitic and cloaked their rejection in strategic rhetoric; "Your community is not composed of good fighters." Others were more practical and explained that they had enough fighters but lacked weapons, asking, "Why do you come with empty hands?" Some partisan leaders were more condescending and said, "You gave your jewelry and gold watches to the Germans. How can you come to us know for protection?"
>
> Meanwhile we heard that two friends from our original group were killed by the partisans who claimed to have found German documents on them. Then the partisans spread rumors that the Germans sent Jews into the forests as spies. Jews, the partisans claimed, were willing to spy and thereby save themselves. The documents in question were standard identity cards that Jews had to carry at all times. The partisans refused to consider the explanation. "How could you surrender your Soviet passports to the enemy in exchange for their identity card?" they asked.
>
> One day while wandering on side roads hoping to at last find a sympathetic ear, a partisan with officers rank came up to us. Riding on a horse with an automatic rifle slung across his chest, he quickly dismounted and began to shout in a murderous voice, "Run at once into the forest! Go!" Mordechai and Nachum ran immediately to the forest. My brother Moshe also took a few steps to distance himself but when he saw that I remained in place he stopped and shouted at me, "Quick, run!" …
>
> My heart dictated that I not turn my back to him though he continued to order me "Into the forest." His finger was on the trigger … "What are you mumbling?" he asked. "I'm saying that we have no possessions." And I lifted my hands as if to say "Here, check my pockets." … The partisan mounted his horse and ordered, "Get out of here and make sure I never see any of you again," and rode off.[465]

Historian Yehuda Bauer traces the sad experience of Jewish fugitives from Baranowicze and Nowogródek in the early period:

> In the summer of 1942, Baranowicze Jews escaped to the partisans for the first time … but most of them were killed by antisemitic partisans. … some of them were killed by bandits disguised as partisans …
>
> The Soviet partisans through whose territory the escapees [from the Jewish artisans' camp in Kołdyczewo] had to pass to reach the Bielski group wanted to kill them, suspecting that they had been sent by the Germans on an espionage mission. Dr. Lewinbok, who was related to the Bielski brothers, managed to dissuade them. …

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[465] (Rabbi) Grainom Lazewnik, *Persumei Nesei/Personal Miracles: The Guiding Hand of Providence* (Brooklyn, New York: Tova Press, 1993), 42–44. A fugitive from Janów Poleski, states that in 1942 Soviet partisans in that area robbed and killed every Jews they came across, and that Jewish fugitives hid from Soviet partisans as much as from Germans. The few Jews the Soviet partisans accepted into their ranks were treated badly. See the testimony of Jankiel Reznik, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/156.

> In the forests these young people [i.e., members of the Jewish underground in Baranowicze] … [faced] sharp antisemitism from the Zhorkin partisan unit, which was responsible for the murders of Dr. [Abrasha] Abramowski and [Mamme (Antek)] Kopelowicz.[466]

> Rampant anti-Semitism among the Soviet partisans was a major problem. Many survivors, as well as a number of official reports by partisan commanders, relate instances where such partisans murdered helpless Jews wandering in the forest, or even overpowered armed Jews.[467]

Other accounts are equally damning. There are numerous testimonies that bear out the fact that, in the early period (at least up to mid–1943), apart from devastating German operations, the greatest peril facing Jews hiding in the forests was not the "hostile" local population, let alone Polish partisans, who were inactive at that time, but rather Soviet partisans who often behaved like bandit groups. It is highly probable that Soviet partisans actually murdered more Jews than they accepted into their ranks. Jews who were simply robbed were fortunate. These testimonies do not mention problems at the hands of Poles. Some examples follow:

> Hundreds of Jews were killed by our own Soviet partisans. In 1941 … the commander of the Pinsk [Pińsk] partisan units issued an order to kill every stranger in the woods who was not attached to a partisan group.
>
> Unaffiliated strangers were immediately shot. Most were Jews who had escaped from ghettos or camps and were hiding in the woods. They did not belong to any combat unit because the partisans did not want them. …
>
> After a few days had passed, I came across a Jewish boy and asked him, "What happened? What is going on? Where are the Jewish boys and girls?"
>
> He hung his head. "Most of the Jewish partisans were dismissed, sent away from the units into Nazi jaws because they did not have rifles." The order had been given by partisan headquarters. The partisans did not want the enemy to think that so many partisans were without rifles. … The easiest solution was to expel the Jews. As always, when the Jews were not needed they were no longer wanted. Some of our Jewish former partisans had survived and were hiding defenceless in the woods.[468]

> After their fifth day spent in the forest, they were surrounded on all sides. Armed men ordered them to remain in their places. Fear fell upon the people, and only when the armed men addressed them in Russian, did the Liskowo people calm down a bit. The armed men demanded wither money or gold. They ordered the people to produce all their valuables by nightfall, at which point they would

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[466] Yehuda Bauer, "Jewish Baranowicze in the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 31 (2003): 122, 128, n.87, 131 n.96. Salomon Wahrhaftig also accuses Ukrainian and Belotussian gangs of killing many Jews who escaped from the ghettos and tried to join Jewish forest groups in the vicinity of Baranowicze. See Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 293.

[467] Bauer, "Nowogródek—The Story of a *Shtetl*," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 35, no. 2 (2007): 53–54.

[468] Faye Schulman, *A Partisan's Memoir: Woman of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Second Story Press, 1995), 104, 186.

return with wagons and take everything away. As the Liskowo Jews found out later from Joseph Mezheritzky's brother, who with his family had hidden out with a friendly Pole in Janina, this same group of armed bandits had been at their place that morning and took everything of any worth that they found. Out of fear of these bandits, who threatened to molest the women, a number of Liskowo Jews had to leave their hideouts in Janina. … The band of outlaws kept their word, and late in the night they came to the earthen bunker. They ordered the people out of the pit, they went inside, and took whatever they found, and then they tore the clothes off the people, and took the shoes off their feet—and vanished with their booty.[469]

In those autumn days of 1942, one of our Jewish groups was attacked by some Russian partisans, headed by someone named Mustapha. There was only one survivor, Moshe Eisenstein …[470]

A typical story of relations between Soviet partisans towards their Jewish counterparts was when a group of 13 young male and female Jewish Partisans waited near Lake Okonin. A few Soviet Partisans joined them seemingly in order to see if the group could be recruited into their Partisan unit. However, they actually came with nefarious purposes—the Russians fell upon the group of Jews, attacking them with knives and other weapons.

Shmuel Eisenstein, who was stabbed twice but survived the incident, recalls the haunting screams of his companions: "I lay motionless until the Russians left, having robbed the bodies of my companions." He then ran five kilometres to the Jewish Partisan base to receive first aid from Dr. Vlodavsky.[471]

Freidel Goldstein-Koepler tells her story: "During the first few months, Partisan fighters were scattered throughout, and they killed many Jews. Once, I was working for a farmer in his garden when suddenly some Partisans from the Sovorov [Suvorov] unit approached us. The farmer hinted to me that I should run. I escaped through the back and hid in an empty potato pit."[472]

Moshe Cooperschmidt happened upon a Ukrainian policeman, who saw him and cocked his weapon. Without hesitating, Cooperschmidt shot the policeman, took his weapon and his coat, and ran off. … soon after some Soviet Partisans caught him and murdered him to avenge the Ukrainian's death. When Jews in the area heard of the incident, they quickly ran deeper into the forest in order to evade any further revenge acts.[473]

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[469] "What happened in Liskowo," in Moses Einhorn, ed., *Wolkovisker Yizkor Book* (New York, 1949), 295, Part I of The Volkovysk Memorial Book (Mahwah, New Jersey: Jacob Solomon Berger, 2002).

[470] Account of Fani Solomian Lotz in Boneh, *History of the Jews of Pinsk,* Part Two, Chapter 5.

[471] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 39.

[472] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 40.

[473] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 40.

Yehoshua Gorvitz, from Pinsk [Pińsk], went into the forest with twenty other Jews in search of a Partisan group, with the hope that they may join and perhaps survive the war. At the beginning, it seemed that they had the right idea. They met four Partisans who treated them well. However, a few hours later, they ran into a platoon of Soviet Partisans, who surrounded the Jews and took all their possessions: weapons, money, and any other valuables.[474]

In August. 1942, we joined up with a group of partisans. However, the Gentiles warned us that in this region there is a group of partisans that go by the name Nekrasow, who rob everything from the rescued Jews and shoot them …

Therefore, we had to go a different way, to the forests of Rubezhevichi [Rubieżewicze]. There, we found approximately 150 Jews of Rubezhevichi. …They told us that partisans always come to them … among the partisans that come to them, there are some who take the weapons and everything that they can find from the Jews. One was called Tolek from Kubinow's Otriad. A second was Minin, a military commander of the high headquarters. They told us to be discrete, as they may soon come to take our weapons. …

The roundups began on July 10, 1943. … They [the Germans] left the Pushta [Naliboki forest] after three weeks …

Minin appeared during that time. He was somewhat drunk, and he shot three women and one man of the Rubezhevichi Jews.[475]

Among the runaway Jews many were older people, children, and women. The Russians were afraid that when the Germans would catch such people they might in turn tell about the Russians' whereabouts. To prevent this from happening, and for their own safety, the Russians would deliver to the authorities the unarmed, helpless Jews, or they would themselves kill them.[476]

Just as we had located a place for ourselves in this beautiful forest and began to breathe freely, a group of riders rushed out and ordered us to come to the nearby clearing. These were Russian Partisans. One could see the hatred for Jews in their eyes. … They screamed and cursed and even threatened denunciation and murder. All this for one reason: to rob us of what was left of our "property" that we had brought from the ghetto. … And they, after taking all the booty, left us just as they had come.[477]

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[474] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 43.

[475] Yechiel Silber, "The Partisans of Sochaczew," in Sztejn (Shtayn, Stein) and Wejszman (Vaysman, Weissman), *Pinkas Sokhatshev,* 514 ff. Some armed Jews captured Minin and wanted to kill him, but were persuaded to turn Minin over to the supreme command or face annihilation by the Soviet partisans. Afterwards, these Jews encountered a group of Soviet partisans bent on revenge. Minin was eventually sentenced to death by execution. Silber writes: "The partisans were weak until 1943 … Later the partisans strengthened, and began to take over small settlements. They participated in regional activities and imposed taxes. Thus did they succeed in instilling a bit of fear in the peasant population."

[476] Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 184.

[477] Liza Ettinger, *From the Lida Ghetto to the Bielski Partisans,* typescript, December 1984, 45–46, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives, Washington, D.C.

At first the [Soviet] partisans regarded us unfavourably, but then they showed what they were capable of. … When they caught Jews in the region they killed them. There were very many such cases. We then saw them wearing their clothes. … Among others they killed Abramski, Motel Grinwald, Izrael Reznik. Partisans killed them. They were Russians who had escaped from captivity [i.e., German camps for Soviet POWs] … there were various groups that called on hamlets, drank vodka, and robbed the local population. … They also attacked a loose group [of Jewish refugees] who weren't associated with us. They were hidden in the forest … they found out about their location, they came and took them out. They killed all of them. Many perished in that way.[478]

At the end of the summer of 1942 … we left the [Stołpce] ghetto. … We heard that there were partisans in the forest and that they attacked Jews to rob them and often killed them. We avoided the partisans as much as we could. … One day five Jews—four men and I—went to a village for bread. … A partisan stopped us. He carried out an inspection. He took everything out of our pockets: money, watches, even handkerchiefs. During the inspection he mocked us and said that he would kill me … while holding a raised automatic gun … [One of the Jews struck the partisan while he was distracted and they managed to escape.] That partisan named Nitka … later roamed around the forest day and night looking for us, and would kill any Jew that he came across. …

In March 1943 … the partisans killed nine Jews who escaped from the camp in Świerzeń.[479]

Later, in April [1943], we were told that my parents and my family were no longer alive. My father and my uncle had travelled to a village, where we had acquaintances, to bring food. On their way, they chanced upon drunken partisans, who said, "You are robbing our village," and they killed them.[480]

What I saw on the river bank [of the Niemen] robbed me of my speech.

The bodies of several Jewish women lay on the ground. It was not necessary for me to ask Tevl who had shot them. After swimming all the way across the river, when they finally reached the shore … It was not Germans who had done this—they didn't even dare step onto "our shore" unless it was part of a mass attack. These Jewish women had been murdered by our own "friends"—by other [Soviet] partisans. …

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[478] Testimony of Ester Marchwińska (née Swierżeńska), November 1970, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/3567. In an earlier testimony, Elżbieta Marchwińska (née Estera Świerzewska), the wife of Józef Marchwiński (Bielski's second in command for a time), attributes the death of Dr. Botwiński of Mir to Soviet partisans See Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 255.

[479] Testimony of Estera Gorodejska, dated August 9, 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/568. Gorodejska does not report any problems with Polish partisans.

[480] Jacob Shepetinski, *Jacob's Ladder* (London: Minerva Press, 1996), 61. As for the fate of the others, the author continues: "My mother and her three children, Uri, who was six, Yechiel, who was twelve, and Reuben, who was eighteen, together with my aunt, built a shelter in the forest and lived for a while like wolves. On the 24th of March, 1943, there was a pursuit hunt. The Germans threw hand grenades into the shelter my mother had built, and killed my mother and her two children. How Reuben died, I do not know to this day."

Returning to the staff headquarters, I found both Vladimir Tsaryuk and Stieptshenko there. Tsaryuk was the official representative of the Byelorussian partisan staff. Those women had just escaped from the Nazis, I said to him. Who murdered them?

… Tsaryuk "explained":

"We were warned by reliable sources that the Gestapo had sent out a group of women to put poison in our food kettles—we're in a war—can't do anything about it now …"[481]

Grishka was something of a mystery; he claimed that he came from Siberia and was proud to be called, not simply Grishka, but Grishka-Sibiryak (Gishka the Siberian). … While Grishka was huge, Nicolai, his companion, was a short man with an ugly pockmarked face and the agility of a cat. To hear the dreadful screams, 'Bey Zhydov Spasay Rassiyu!, ('Hit the Jews and save Russia!) with which they announced their arrival back in camp, with full bottles of vodka on each side of their saddles and guns ablaze, is an ugly memory.

The few Jews who managed to escape to the forest from the burning ghettos and were unfortunate enough to fall into Grishka's hands suffered badly. The silent trees could tell many tales of murder and rape. We all knew of his excesses but he was beyond control.

A curious thing was that the girl he had singled out in the camp was Jewish. … She prepared his bread and pork for the road, looked after his clothes and shared her bed with him. Grishka went to some pains to conceal their relationship, for to admit it openly would cause a loss of face. … When it became obvious to us all that she was heavily pregnant and could no longer continue to work in the kitchen, he cast her off. She came to me weeping. No child was permitted in the camp. [The child was left to die.]

… his lust for killing had made his name feared in the forest and beyond. Complaints came in from innocent villagers who suffered at his hands and who had no reason to feel other than loathing for the man who received nomination for the highest distinction his country could offer—'Hero of the Soviet Union.'

It was inevitable that the high command should become aware of Grishka's excesses; too many innocent peasants had been killed, too many women raped and too many huts burned. He had desecrated the unwritten law of the forest. High command passed judgement. Grisha Sibiryak must die. It was a traumatic day when the comrades with whom he had fought carried out their orders.[482]

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[481] Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto,* 128.

[482] Berk, *Destined to Live,* 162–63, 166. After the author (Leon Berkowicz) made his way to the Soviet partisans with his Polish benefactor Pashka, the Soviets robbed Pashka of his pistol and the watch Berkowicz had given him, and placed Berkowicz under 24-hour guard until he proved himself, because he was a Jew. Even though the partisans had agreed to accept Berkowicz since thet needed a doctor, the commissar later admitted that he nearly had him shot the day he arrived at their camp. Ibid., 118, 122, 218. We learn that the commanders of this Soviet partisan unit "could not stand Jews and were furious when a strict order from Moscow ordained that anyone, without distinction as to nationality or creed, willing to fight against the Germans, must be enrolled in partisan units. Powerless to defy the order but unable to repress his true feelings, Bobkov gave the Jews he was forced to take in all the rotten jobs." Ibid., 142. Although Berkowicz served with the Soviet partisans in the area south of Baranowicze for about a year and a half, his memoirs provide no information about attacks by the Home Army. On the other hand, fierce and bloody clashes with such small groups as Chechenians are noted. In one case, the Soviet partisans even forced a detonator into the vagina of badly beaten young girl who was taken prisoner. Ibid., 197–200.

The mass annihilation of Jews in the towns of this part of Byelorussia took place from June to August of 1942. Many hundreds of Jews from the towns—men, women and children—fled at that time to the Kozyany [Koziany] Forest seeking shelter. They organized themselves into groups, forming "family camps." There were no organized partisan units there yet. … They encountered groups of Russians, whom the Jews thought were partisans but who in some cases divested them of the few weapons they possessed, took some of their clothing, and then chased them away. These men were former Soviet soldiers who remained in the area after the retreat in the summer of 1941 or had escaped from German prisoner of war camps. They roamed the forests, having nothing to do with the partisans or with fighting the Germans. Some of them were hard-bitten anti-Semites and molested the Jews who crossed their path. The harsh living conditions and clashes with these bands forced fairly large numbers of Jews to leave the forest for the ghettos that still existed then.[483]

The closer the evening, the smaller is the tension. It is best at night, when there is deep darkness. Then the Germans do not travel and the partisans loiter drunkenly somewhere in the villages. When sober, they are a greater danger for us that [sic] the Germans, because the forest is the partisan's home. More Jews fell by the hands of [Soviet] partisans than of Germans.[484]

Once, escapees from a ghetto met a group of Russian escaped prisoners. The Russians robbed the Jews. Also, the prisoners threatened the Jews that they would kill them if they tried to join them so they wouldn't lead the Germans to them.[485]

The surviving partisans had come to a decision … Jews would no longer be permitted to remain in the forest because it was clear that their presence had provoked the Nazi raids … Jews who had been taken prisoner by the Nazis had betrayed the names of peasants who had given them food. The Nazis shot these peasants and burned their homes down. …

In order to push the Jews out of "their" forest the partisan staff resorted to a tactic of terrorizing and robbing them. Several Jews, carrying on their backs a few pounds of potatoes that they had dug up out of abandoned fields, were held up by armed "partisans" who forced them to sit on the ground, searched their pockets and robbed them of everything they had, including the potatoes. One scoundrel even tore the boots off Beyla Pitkovski's feet.

Koptya Korolyov, who was interested only in gold or money, justified his actions with the following "logic": "The Nazis are already on the outskirts of Moscow and Stalingrad. In any case, they will kill all the Jews, so what's the difference?"

Commissar Tatarikov and Sheyndl Krupenya managed to get away from these robbers a few times, but in October 1942 some partisans caught them and accused Tatarikov of hoarding Jewish

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[483] Arad, *The Partisan,* 116.

[484] Account of Miriam Swirnowski-Lieder in N. Blumenthal, ed., *Sefer Mir* (Jerusalem: The Encyclopaedia of the Diaspora, 1962), column 52.

[485] Dov Katzovitch (Petach Tikva), "With the Partisans and in the Red Army," in David Shtokfish, ed., *Book in Memory of Dokshitz-Parafianow* [Dokszyce-Parafianowo Memorial Book], (Israel: Organization of Dokshitz-Parafianow Veterans in Israel and the Diaspora, 1990), Chapter 4, Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/dokshitsy/>.

gold and money that belonged to the staff. Having no such treasure, he could not give it to them. They held a "trial" and then shot him. His real "crime," of course, had been his humane attitude toward Jews.

One group of partisans came upon Jascha Shepetinski's father and uncle, who had just been given food by friendly peasants. The partisans accused them of robbing the peasants … The penalty was death by shooting.

Shlomo Tchernechovski was ordered by three partisans to give up his rifle. He refused to do so. They shot him and buried him. The following day, they remembered he had been wearing a watch. They dug up the grave and took the watch off his wrist.

Noah Obulianski, Chaim Elya Lyuberski and the Birnbaum family were also killed by partisans. …

Late in October, Leyma [Pitkovski], while on sentry duty one night, was shot by other partisans.

At the end of October [1942] the Jews were ordered to leave the forest. The 144 Jews refused to do so and began building earthen huts for the winter. After a month of fighting the cold, the hunger and the hostile partisans, Rachel Rabinowich and the rabbi from Ivacivici [Iwacewicze] gave up. A new Jewish cemetery was consecrated in the forest. …

Around that time a new commander was appointed to head the Soviet-Byelorussian detachment. Vladimir Nikolayevich Bobkov … he was also a drunkard and an anti-Semite. Even the formerly friendly Michalin partisans became infected with the anti-Jewish virus. The new Jewish cemetery in the forest continued to grow.

At the end of November, Vaska came to the Jews with the news that the staff had decided to kill all the remaining Jews in the forest. He therefore advised them, as a "good friend," to get away while they could still run.[486]

Late in October, 1942, 20 well-armed partisans from the Huta Michaliner [?] woods visited our camp … They were friendly at first … they turned against us. They were led by a [Soviet] chief of staff who apparently believed that it was because of our group the Nazis attacked the woods and the villages around the woods. Anti-Semitic, the commander harassed us constantly. …

As it turned out, the Germans were no more dangerous than the partisans themselves. On one of our trips from the fields a group of partisans ordered us to lie on the ground so they could search us. Then they robbed us of our better clothing and shoes. Detaining us for hours, they let us go with the warning that we would be shot if we were ever seen again in that vicinity. Another night, roving Wolcze [Wilcze] Nory ["Wolf Caves"] partisans not only robbed us but beat us with the butts of their rifles.

The Wolcze Nory [Soviet] partisans were now in complete domination of the forest. Desperate men, they badgered us constantly even though, by this time, we were barefoot and almost naked and had nothing left for them. …

Seryosha, our political officer, was no longer with us. He and his Jewish sweetheart, Shaindel, were hiding somewhere in the woods. When the rulers of the forest eventually found Seryosha they demanded the gold and money he had collected from ghetto Jews who had escaped to the woods. … they "judged" him, found him guilty and ordered his execution. He was shot immediately. …

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[486] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 346–49.

Early one morning, the partisan chief of staff gave us an ultimatum: leave the forest by the second of November or be shot. Other Jewish groups, faced with the same threat, chose to leave. Our group of 170 voted to stay. … Most felt that leaving would mean certain death. …
[The author then describes a confrontation with Soviet partisans, who posed as German police and tried to elicit information about the partisan camps from her.]

Six months later, after we again joined the partisans, we learned that our theory about the "local police" had been correct. We met the partisans who caught me. They said they didn't shoot me because they admired my courage. No matter how they tried to scare me, I didn't give the partisans away. My asking to be killed and my physical condition made them take pity on me. Not until much later, when I learned that the partisans had killed many of the Jews they had caught and tested, did I realize how lucky I was.[487]

He [i.e., their Christian benefactor] found a troop of [Soviet] partisans and brought us to them. They were hostile, suspecting us as agents of the German intelligence services. They arranged a quick trial and convicted us to death. Before the execution hour approached a Krazhina partisan asked us who we were and from where we came. When I told him my name, he informed me that my brother Yehuda Yosef Potashnik is serving as a partisan nearby. The Krazhina partisan told the commander that I am a well-known partisan's sister and he tore the paper verdict.

I was transferred with Mariyasha Kagan to Baksht [Bakszty]. There were many active partisan units in the area. My brother Yehuda Yosef took me to the Lidayev partisan unit, in the Nalibok [Naliboki] forest.[488]

Shortly afterwards, Sonia [a Jewish girl living with a Belorussian partisan] came into the tent and told us that she had bad news. Her "husband" had told her that a few of the more bitter partisans had decided to get rid of us—they didn't need us. …

… most of the Russian partisan groups treated Jewish escapees not as allies, as potential fellow fighters, but rather as enemies on a par with the Nazis themselves. ...

A few days later, Tanya and I [Rochelle] were cooking a meal at the campfire. It was dawn. The partisans who were plotting against us had just returned after being out all night. They were drunk and laughing and they came to sit by the fire. They told us that they had ambushed and killed some young Jews on the road leading from Minsk to the east. They said that they had killed the boys right off and had been raping the girls all night long. When they were finished, they shot the Jewish "sluts." …

That day, after hours of running and hiding, Tanya and I crossed the Luze River and entered into the large wilderness region called the Nalibocka [Naliboki] Forest. … It was at that time that we met up with another Russian partisan group that called itself by the name of their army training—

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[487] Bar Oni, *The Vapor,* 73–79. The "Wolf Caves" were located 30–40 kilometres southwest of Słonim, in the vicinity of Rafałówka.

[488] Pnina Hayat (née Potashnik), "What My Eyes Have Seen," in E. Leoni, ed., *Wolozin: The Book of the City and of the Etz Hayyim Yeshiva.* Posted on the internet at: www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/volozhin/volozhin.html; translation of *Wolozyn: Sefer shel ha-ir ve-shel yeshivat "Ets Hayim"* (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Wolozin in Israel and the USA, 1970), 550 ff.

the *parachutzistn* [i.e., NKVD paratroopers]. … There were about a dozen *parachutzistn*—they were in dirty uniforms, and their eyes took in Tanya and me as if we were cattle or worse.

We tried to explain to the *parachutzistn* how we had run away from the German ambush. We didn't know that the *parachutzistn* were the worst of all. It was a group that took special effort and pleasure in hunting down Jewish partisans. They had killed a group of fourteen boys from Jack's town of Mir—that I learned only later. … They had no intention of letting us just walk away from them. They told us straight off, "Drink vodka and eat so that it will be easier for you to die. If you get drunk, you won't feel the bullets." …

We watched them drink, and they thought that we were as drunk as we could be. But in fact they were so drunk that they couldn't tell what our condition was. The river had started to freeze up a little. When it got to be evening, they told us to run. They said, "Okay, now it's time to get rid of you." We ran to the river, they were shooting and I was waiting for the bullets to hit. … But neither of us was hit. We crossed the river and ran back into the woods. …

Tanya had begged the Russians to let her go because she was Jewish and not an informant—and also because she was pregnant. Even if the Russians genuinely suspected Petrovich, they could have let a pregnant woman go. But they killed all of them. That was Tanya's fate. …

The Russian partisans who shared the woodlands with us could not bring themselves to let us alone. … If our boys from the bunker went out for food at night, and they ran into a small band of Russian partisans, those partisans would take their food and kill them. While that was happening, the Russians would also complain that the Jewish partisans only stole food and never fought with the Germans. … Many of my friends were killed … by our supposed allies the Russian partisans. They killed fourteen boys from my hometown of Mir in a single day.[489]

We left the ghetto in Gleboki [Głębokie] in March, 1943. … As soon as it got dark, we left town and entered the woods. We were twenty-three people altogether, including the children. It was cold and there was still snow on the ground. … It took us three long, dark, exhausting nights to get to Nevery. …

When we finally arrived at Nevery, we asked for the partisans. The peasants directed us to a house where some partisans were drinking. As we approached, the partisans came outside, staggering and drunk, and obviously displeased at the sight of us. They pulled out their guns and made us take our boots off and hand them over, together with anything else of value we possessed. Then they put us against the wall of the house, pointed their guns at us, and made us feel like our last moment alive had arrived. But then, for some reason, they changed their mind.[490]

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[489] Jack Sutin and Rochelle Sutin, *Jack and Rochelle: A Holocaust Story of Love and Resistance* (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1995), 76, 79–80, 82–83, 88, 117.

[490] Alice Singer-Genis with Emunah Herzog, *I Won't Die Hungry: A Holocaust Survivor's Memoir* (Bloomington, Indiana: AuthorHouse, 2011), 37–38. When the Jews reached the forest and found Jews hiding there in bunkers, most of the bunkers refused to accept the new arrivals. They survived by begging for food from villagers. Ibid., 39–40.

> Finally, the core of the Mir group, under Kharkhas, joined a unit in Platon's area, called *Za Sovietskayu Belaus* (For a Soviet Belorussia). A violently anti-Semitic subunit (called *Danila*) killed six Jewish partisans. [General] Platon refused to intervene.[491]
>
> …the Soviet commander in the forests to the south, around Porozów (and Różana), reportedly was an anti-Semite who murdered all the Jews he discovered hiding there.[492]

Another Jewish woman, after escaping from Mir during the ghetto breakout in August 1942, joined a small family group which was attacked by Russian partisans; her absence saved her and she became the sole survivor of the group.[493] Tellingly, two Jews from the village of Grań, in the vicinity of Naliboki forest, who hid in the forest by day and spent the night with friendly peasant families, warned fellow Jews about the Soviet partisans—"They're worse than the Germans!"—and went on to relate a litany of murders, assaults and robberies that Jews fell victim to at their hands.[494] Fajga Frejnkman, who wandered in the countryside near Rubieżewicze with several other Jews, was afraid of Soviet partisans because they killed Jewish fugitives. She reported that many Belorussian farmers were willing to help them with food and allowed them to stay in their barns and attics for a few days at a time.[495] Yaakov Mazovetsky, a Jew who escaped from a labour camp in Lida in December 1942 and was sheltered by a retired Polish officer, was warned about Russian partisans in the area "who killed, with their own hands, lone Jews searching for shelter in the forest."[496]

Historian David Meltser provides the following overview of the relationship between Jews and the Soviet partisans:

> It was not at all easy for a Jew fleeing the ghetto to become a partisan. Gentile [i.e., Soviet] units accepted Jews unwillingly, even when they brought along arms. In early November 1942 the chief of the central staff of the partisan movement, Panteleimon Ponomarenko, ordered his brigade commanders to reject individuals and small groups of people who had by some miracle escaped from the ghettos—namely, Jews. The pretext could not have been more transparent: among them, said Ponomarenko, there might be "agents sent by the Germans."
>
> The Kremlin demonstrated complete indifference to the fate of the Jews in the ghettos. On 5 September 1942 Stalin, in his role as people's commissar of defense, published Decree No. 189,

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[491] Bauer, *The Death of the Shtetl,* 142.

[492] Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945,* vol. 2, Part A, 937.

[493] Testimony of Cila Kapelowicz, who ended up in the Bielski group. See Tec, *Defiance,* 229.

[494] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 136.

[495] Testimony of Fajga Frejnkman, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2994.

[496] Account of Yaakov Mazovetsky in L. Losh, ed., *Sefer zikaron le-kehilot Shtutshin Vasilishki Ostrina Novi Dvor Rozhanka* (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Szczuczyn, Wasiliszki, Ostryna, Nowy-Dwor, Rozanka, 1966), 92.

> "On the Problems of the Partisan Movement." It contained not a word about helping the Jews, who had been condemned to death. …
>
> The central staff of the partisan movement did everything it could to hinder the creation of independent Jewish partisan detachments, and in a number of cases such units were disbanded. The most important role in saving people who had fled the ghettos was played by partisan detachments of Jewish families. The idea of founding the family detachments came from Tuvia Bielski, who in the spring of 1942, together with his three brothers, Asael, Zusia, and Archik, engineered an escape from the Novogrudok [Nowogródek] ghetto and created a detachment in the Naliboki wood [sic]. In all, 1,230 Jews from the ghettos of Novogrudok, Lida, and Minsk took refuge with the Bielski partisans. Another Jewish family detachment, organized by Sholom Zorin, numbered 600 persons, and Yeheskel Atlas established a large family detachment in Lipchansky [Lipiczany] wood, where Jews fleeing many towns in the Prinemansk [Niemen] region took refuge. There were similar detachments in the Miadel [Miadzioł] district by Lake Naroch [Narocz], the Lukoml district at Vitebshchino and in Polesye [Polesie]. The Israeli historian Leonid Smilovitsky put the number of persons in Jewish family detachments in Belorussia at 5,000.[497]

In the early period, the forests held many Soviet stragglers—army deserters and fugitive POWs—who formed undisciplined groups, some of which had ties to the nascent partisan movement. Their relations with Jewish fugitives were strained, if not openly hostile. Leon Kahn, for example, wrote that the Soviet partisans were a "thoroughly reprehensible" group who soon "established a reputation as thieves, drunks, and rapists" in the countryside surrounding the forest. "But they had one thing our group lacked, Kahn points out, "they were seasoned fighters." In particular, the Soviet partisans regarded the Jewish family groups, with whom they clashed over food expropriation, as a "nuisance." The quarrel between the two opposing sides "grew more bitter."[498] According to a Jewish partisan who fought under Markov, anti-Semitism "was rooted so deeply in everyday life that it sometimes outweighed the Soviet hatred of the Germans."[499] A woman partisan recalled that sexual exploitation was endemic during the entire existence of the Markov Brigade:

> Once two of our women were spent on a special mission with a Soviet parachute group. When they returned, they had syphilis and said that they had been raped. We paid a peasant to keep them in his house and give them penicillin so the syphilis wouldn't spread. …

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[497] David Meltser, "Belorussia," in Laqueur, *The Holocaust Encyclopedia,* 64–65.

[498] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 88–89.

[499] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 172. For additional references to anti-Semitism in the Soviet partisan movement see pp. 146, 175, 208–209.

> One night our [Russian] commander asked me to sleep near him. Looking straight in his face, I spit on him. He was so surprised that he expelled me … But not all women could refuse the commanders.[500]

The following accounts demonstrate the extent of the mistreatment of the civilian population and Jewish partisans and the measures taken to stop such abuse:

> So when I describe my life as a partisan, I relate first of all to the unruly military, political, and ethical discipline that prevailed in the Kirov Regiment in which I began to serve in February 1943.
>
> I was in the regiment at a time that far-reaching changes were about to occur. In April 1943, the entire regiment stood in formation in the pushtza [*puszcza*] of Rozheny [Różana]. We were ordered to dismantle all the weapons. Then Col. Linkov (Batya) said to us: "I shot your commander, Major Konstantin Borisovich Shetznekov, three times, in the presence of the general secretary of the Anti-Fascist Committee, Urbanovich Iosip Pablovich (Maxim)."
>
> For a moment, there was deathly silence. Everyone was confused and shocked. Linkov added: "Iron discipline is the first prerequisite in our war in the rear of the enemy. The war to protect the homeland against the Nazi invade requires that we be firm and merciless. We must uproot the partisans from the rural villages and begin to move toward the enemy. The lawlessness that prevailed in these villages, the unrestrained licentiousness with the local women and foreign girls, the drunkenness, and the thefts and looting of village property—have turned the partisan movement into a collection of bands of rapists and robbers. This must stop. Shetznekov devoted himself to not fighting the Nazi enemy. … he organized bands of robbers under the guise of partisans. He gained his men's loyalty by letting them rape, steal, and loot in partisan areas.
>
> Also executed was a captain, Kapralov, this following the appalling murder of a Jewish girl, Rina Friedman. The incident took place in March … He got drunk and went into the tent in which the sisters Rina and Sonia Friedman were living. Although Rina defended herself as best she could, he brutally raped her and then shot her. A group of officers headed by the general secretary of the party in the Brest-Litovsk [Brześć] district, Lt. Col. Bobrov Wasily Vasilovich, were brought in to investigate the matter. They set up a partisan military court, which sentenced Kapralov to death by shooting. The judgment was carried out on the spot. Another partisan, who had been accused of robbery and looting of village homes, was also executed.
>
> Following these incidents, disciple in the regiment improved. … But the hidden and open anti-Semitism continued as it was.
>
> In the late fall 1943, during the siege, Gershon Mizritzki, his wife, and daughters hid in a house of one of the [Belorussian] farmers. The neighbors informed and handed them over to the [Belorussian] police. They were shot and killed, except for Genia, the pretty young daughter, who miraculously managed to escape to the forest. In the forest, a partisan, Kozak, accosted her, forcibly removed her clothes, and raped her. Genia fought back and then Kozak took his pistol and killed her. He fled from the regiment and hid among the villagers. The regiment's commissar, Podovny,

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[500] Testimony of Chaya Porus Palevsky in Yitzchak Mais, ed., *Daring to Resist: Jewish Defiance in the Holocaust* (New York: Museum of Jewish Heritage, 2007), 123.

> ordered that he be caught and brought, dead or alive, to the regiment, to be tried for rape and murder. A group of partisans went into action and quickly found out where he was … The partisans broke in and captured him, cuffed him and brought him to the regiment, where he was tried and executed by firing squad, for all to see and hear. There were many cases like that.[501]

Shmuel Spector, the chronicler of the Volhynian Jews, acknowledges that until 1943 some of the Soviet partisan units "had more of a bandit character, and Jews who tried to join them were stripped of their weapons and possessions, sometimes killed and, at the best, thrown out." He argues that, "Only at the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943 did the Central Staff of the Soviet Partisan Movement succeed in imposing its authority and discipline on these units."[502]

Historian Leonid Smilovitsky, however, details a litany of mistreatment of Jews at the hands of Soviet partisans well into 1944, including attacks on individual Jewish stragglers, executions of Jews (including ardent Communists) as German spies, Jewish nationalists and traitors, turning on Jewish fugitives after appropriating their arms and possessions, attacks on Jewish partisan marauders and their camps, stealing the "acquisitions" they had confiscated from the civilian population, and expelling Jews from Soviet partisan units. As a result, many Jews who came to the forest and sought admission into the Soviet partisans were simply afraid to reveal their true identities.[503]

> The most successful escapes from the [Minsk] ghetto were organized flights with a partisan guide (usually a woman or an adolescent). However, there were betrayals. Rachel Grodner reported that a messenger from a partisan group near Rudensk—a man by the name Fedor Turovets—repeatedly came to the ghetto and selected people whom he said he was taking to the partisans. He led them to a wood 10 or 15 kilometers from Minsk, seized precious objects and arms from them, and abandoned them. With his gun he threatened those who tried to follow him. The people were compelled to return to the ghetto, but on their way were often caught by the Gestapo. Those who perished in this way included sisters Liuba and Asia Kaganovs, Genia Feldman with her son, and many others. After Abram Rozin fled from the ghetto in 1943 and reached a partisan party in the area of the Ruzhanskaia [Różana] pushcha (thick forest) not far from Ivantsevichi [Iwacewicze], the commander Matevosian gave him a hostile reception. The leader announced to the group that the war would finish soon, "and look, a Jew comes running from Minsk and wants to reserve his place in a bear kiosk…" David Karpilov, who had been an editor at the Zviazda publishing house before the war, was shot by the partisans when he came to them from the ghetto; they suspected

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[501] Berestitzki, *Run For Your Life, My Child!*, 96–97, 99. The following Jewish partisans were executed by the Soviets: Avraham Robintzik and his brothers, Hershel Hoynovsky, Yerachmiel Rabinowitz, Berel Segal and his brother Lulik, Yosef Untershul, Meychik from Białystok, Yaakov Lerner, and Boris Feldsher.

[502] Shmuel Spector, "Jewish Resistance in Small Towns of Eastern Poland," in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, eds., *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939–46* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1991), 143. Hundreds of Jews were also killed by Soviet partisans in Volhynia. According to one Jewish testimony, 60 Jews were disarmed and killed in Kamień Koszyrski. See the testimony of Samuel Reznik in Roskowski, *.Zydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 230.

[503] Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 149–59.

that he was a German spy. Maria Naumovna Zaiats was denied admission to a partisan party; fortunately, she was rescued by Jewish partisans from the Sholom Zorin party who picked her up in the woods. Rivka Ekkel'chik fought in the Suvorov party under the assumed name of Anna Bykova, Roza Levina posed as Olga Kovnatskaia, and Giller Mendelevich Steiman became Ilia Maksimovich.[504]

When operational conditions worsened, the leaders of some detachments that had "tolerated" Jews in their midst sometimes dumped them. In October 1943 the Nazis began a broad-based punitive action against the partisans of the Shirokov Brigade, which operated in the Kozina-Glubokoe [Głębokie] District. The commander of the Antonov Detachment ordered nine Jews to report to him and told them to leave the camp. His explanation was that the detachment was too big, the Germans had already entered the forest, and it was impossible to break through their covering force together. At the same time he ordered a shoemaker and a tailor to stay behind. The detachment was not dissolving at all; it was only expelling its Jews, a fact that the command of the unit did not bother to conceal. The Jews protested vehemently, saying that the partisans first took their weapons and then would not allow then to stay with the detachment. They shouted that the partisans should shoot them on the spot, that they had nowhere to go, but all was in vain. The rejected Jews tried to follow the detachment at a short distance, but some Belorussian partisans bringing up the rear of the column warned the Jews that they had orders to shoot if the latter would not back off.

The story of Itzhak and Reuven Yuzhuk is similar. Along with the cousins Osher Goldman and Zeev Senederuk, they hid in the woods for several months after the liquidation of the ghetto in Pogost-Zagorodskii [Pohost Zahorodny] in the Pinsk [Pińsk] District 9of Pinsk Oblast'). Local residents advised them to look for the partisans near Lunents [Łuniniec]. … The partisans provided the brother with food and a separate tent, but several days later, when the partisans were ready to move on, they abandoned the four Jews, advising them to obtain weapons and attack the enemy on their own. … Another group of Jews, fleeing from Gantsevichi [Hancewicze], was accepted temporarily by one of the partisan detachments, but later the partisans told them to leave the camp. They were starved and weakened, with no weapons or military experience, and so they refused. After giving them several warnings, the partisans shot them. That is how Yakov Rabinov, his brother Yankel, Iosif Mednik, and a certain Grinbaum met their ends.[505]

Yakov Rubechnik, a third-year medical student from the Minsk ghetto, died under similar circumstances. The partisans in the forest discovered poison that Rubechnik carried to take if the Germans caught him. For him this was a death sentence. A Jewish family, including a five-year-old child, was shot in the Borisov District (Minsk Oblast') in 1942 on the charge of plotting sabotage.

The counterintelligence services of the partisan detachments were trained to track Jewish "turncoats," and if these were Polish Jews who furthermore had worked, albeit as forced laborer,

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[504] Leonid Smilovitsky, "Minsk Ghetto: An Issue of Jewish Resistance," *Shvut* (Studies in Russian and East European Jewish History and Culture, Tel Aviv University and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), no. 1–2 (17–18), 1995: 161–82; an English translation was published in *Belarus SIG Online Newsletter,* no. 8 (August 1, 2001), posted online at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/belarus/newsletter/minsk_ghetto.htm>.

[505] Leonid Smilovitsky, "Antisemitism in the Soviet Partisan Movement, 1941–1944: The Case of Belorussia," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies,* vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 207–34, at pp. 214–15.

under the Germans, their situation was hopeless. On March 18, 1943, a Polish Jew, Professor Genrikh Maksimilianovich Czapliński of the Kraków and L'vov [Lwów] conservatories, crossed over to the partisans of the A. F. Donukalov Brigade, operating in the Minsk area. … Pnonmarenko and L. F. Tsanava, the Belorussian People's Commissar of State Security, reported to Stalin on May 15, 1943, that the professor was a German intelligence agent who had been specifically sent to infiltrate Soviet lines, "an old agent of German intelligence" who had worked in a number of countries. The professor was transferred to the Main Administration of Soviet counter-intelligence, or "Smersh" (the acronym for "death to Spies") under V. S. Abakunov, where his trail (predictably) disappears.[506]

The absence of directives from the CHQPM [Central Headquarters of the Partisan Movement] and BHQPM [Belorussian Headquarters of the Partisan Movement] on aid to the prisoners in the ghettos and Jews in hiding meant that commander inclined to antisemitism had a free hand. Especially in detachments lacking military discipline there were instances of harassment, looting, robbery, and even the murder of Jews. …

Lieutenant Kliuchnik, commander of the Shchors Detachment, killed the Jew Zaskin, commissar of the Lazo Detachment, and the partisan Petrashkevich (also a Jew) without even having charged them with any wrongdoing. Nekrasov, commander of a platoon in the headquarters company of the Stalin Brigade, marched out an entire group of Jews from the Frunze Brigade and had them shot.[507]

Chaim Podberezkin fought in the Mikhail Lediaev Detachment of the For Soviet Belarus Brigade. … In the fall of 1943 Podberezkin and a group of nine other partisans succesfully sabotaged a railroad. They stopped at a village for a drunken celebration before heading back to their base. On the road back, Podberezkin sat in front and drove the horse, with three others in the cart behind. One of them, Kozlov, suggested that they "bump the Yid off." Hearing no dissent, he put the barrel of his gun to the back of Podberezkin's skull and with one shot took off half his head.[508]

A tragedy in the Stalin Brigade's Dzerzhinsky Detachment, which was operating in the Baranovichi [Baranowicze] Oblast', caused a considerable stir. On their own authority detachment commander Konstantin Feopentevich Shashkin and political commissar Evstafii Petrovich Liakhov shot the partisan Grigorii Rivin for being a "Jewish nationalist." After the fact they portrayed the matter as a decision taken collectively by the detachment command.[509]

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[506] Ibid., 219.

[507] Ibid., 219–20.

[508] Ibid., 227. In a highly unusual move, after some Jews carried out an investigation and launched a formal complaint, Kozlov was put on trial and hanged. The commander of the demolition unit was shot for covering up the crime. Ibid., 228.

[509] Ibid., 221.

> Permissiveness on the part of the authorities encouraged new violations. In one fall 1943 episode, partisans of the Dzerzhinsky Brigade … fell upon Jews of the Parkhomenko Detachment while the latter were on a mission to obtain food supplies at the village of Liuben in the Ivenets [Iwieniec] District of Baranovichi [Baranowicze] Oblast'. With an eight to three advantage, the Dzerzhinsky partisans cried "Beat the Jews!" roughed up the Parkhomenko-ites, and carried off all the supplies the latter had collected. …
>
> Jews remained the target of attacks right up to the liberation. During the night of March 18, 1944, in the village of Mostishche in the Novogrudok [Nowogródek] District, partisans of the Voroshilov Detachment (the most senior detachment of the Karitachi Partisan Formation) disarmed seven Jews of the Kalinin Detachment. Two days later partisans of the Furmanov Detachment of the Chapaev Brigade detained a wagon train of Kalinin troops and seized twenty-one bags of grain, four hogs, two cows, four horses, and all the personal effects of forty Jewish soldiers. The next day the chief of staff of the Kirov Brigade, Captain Sergei Filipovich Vasiliev, took thirty-five kilograms of salt from them.
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> The commanding officer of the Kalinin Detachment, Tuvia Bielski, complained to Major General Platon that Dzerzhinsky Brigade commander Shaskin had prevented his partisans from crossing the Nieman [Niemen] River bridge and had seized their horses and carts. … Sokolov, Platon's aide, issued an order on April 2, 1944, in which he stated that careful investigation had established instances of "mass terror," in the form of beatings and seizures of weapons, ammunition, clothing, and requisitioned provisions, against Jewish partisans.[510]

The Jewish memoirs and accounts cited below confirm that serious problems persisted throughout the war.[511] Soviet archival documents also confirm this grim picture. Nechama Tec argues that from 1943 on, anti-Semitism among Russian partisans can be traced to two immediate sources: the acceptance of men with a pro-Nazi past, and the stepped-up military engagements.[512] The reality on the ground proved to be far more damning of the partisan leadership.

> Several weeks later new Russian partisans arrived in the district. … [The new leader's] first plan was to shoot down all the Jews in his division.[513]

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[510] Ibid., 223–25.

[511] Since Jewish memoirs relate events that the authors actually experienced at the hands of the Soviets, as opposed to what they heard (as is generally the case when describing atrocities attributed to the Polish partisans), they are far more reliable in their treatment of Soviet atrocities.

Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1941,* 378–401. For example, in June 1943 members of the Zhukov Brigade killed 7 Jewish partisans and devastated a Jewish family camp. Ibid., 399.

[512] Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 292.

[513] Eliezer Tash (Tur-Shalom), ed., *The Community of Semiatych* [Siemiatycze Memorial Book] (Tel Aviv: Association of Former Residents of Semiatych in Israel and the Diaspora, 1965), xi.

I recalled the fate of my brother Elhanan [Kolpanitzky] and his friend Asher, who had been caught in a similar situation after escaping from the ghetto [in Łachwa]. Partisans murdered them. We were worried that our fate would be the same. …

Like Yosel and me, Nisel wanted to join a partisan unit as soon as possible. We began to look for a way to achive our goal, but no partisan unit would accept us.[514]

I [Mina Volkowiski] was in a group with one Jewish woman, Krysia, a beauty. She was Commander Chapajev's mistress. Among us were Chapajev, several fighting men, and a few others. One day we woke up, and Chapajev and the fighters were gone. They left us there … They simply abandoned us. … Later I heard that Krysia had been shot by the Soviet partisans. …

I moved around with this small partisan group. One day we were told to go to headquarters. There I heard terrible things about Jews. They blamed Jews for the German attack; they said that the Jews who were caught gave away partisan secrets. They blamed the Jews for everything.[515]

The commanders of the non Jewish partisans began to harass the Jews. They even reprimanded Hershel Posesorski for bringing so many Jews with no weapons. The Jews were called "free-loaders" "money manipulators" and other anti-Semitic insults. …

The commanders of the non-Jewish partisans did not wait for Hershel Posesorski's return with weapons. While he was away they began to expel the Jews in small groups from the partisan base, telling them to go and kill Germans and get weapons. The small groups that were expelled daily from the partisan camp were sent to a certain death. I was expelled with a group of seven, 5 men and 2 women … we found out how Hershel Posesorski was murdered. This murderer Anantchenko demanded from Hershel his revolver, Hershel refused and Anantchenko killed him.[516]

[The Pobeda partisan unit under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Bulak, A.S. Saborov Brigade:] When Bulak confiscated a Jewish partisan's ammunition, our leadership decided to move to the camp of Orlinsky, and it was at this time that Bulak shot two Jewish woman partisans, Shlovsky

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[514] Kopel Kolpanitzky, *Sentenced to Life: The Story of a Survivor of the Lahwah Ghetto* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2007), 91, 96. Another Jew from Łachwa claims that 150 Jews were murdered by the Soviet partisans. See Dean, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945,* vol. 2, Part B, 1402.

[515] Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 291–92.

[516] Aron Irlicht, "Hershel Posesorski—A Heroic Partisan," in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 3 (1986), 498. On Hershl Posesorski's murder by a Ukrainian unit commander named Ananchenko (his unit included many Ukrainians who had served as policemen for the Germans before switching sides), and the lack of response on the part of the Soviet command, see the account of A.I. in Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,* 242–43.

and Becker, and evicted several families as well. A similar incident occurred in the Aramov camp.[517]

They were former prisoners of war, all Ukrainians. The Germans had given them a chance and incorporated them into their police force … But these Ukrainians moved to the partisans with all the guns and all that they got from the Germans. …

Then six young men came to us, Jewish men. They had been working outside of the ghetto. … When they heard about the liquidation of the ghetto, they came to us … But these partisans killed all the Jews. They would go on an expedition, and each time another of the Jewish boys would not return. It was obvious that they were murdering them. None of them made it.[518]

Then, around Christmas [1942], two Ukrainians joined the [Oktiabr] otriad [commanded by Viktor Panchenkov] and when Bela listened to their talk she heard that as avid anti-Semites they were attacking defenseless Jews. More often than not, their assaults ended in the victims' deaths.[519]

When they were ready to leave, they asked [Jashke] Mazowi to join them. Although he was afraid they might kill him, he followed. On the way one of the Russians volunteered an explanation. "We took a Jew into our otriad, we trusted him and treated him well. He ran away on the sly, without telling us. Because of what he did we shoot all the Jews we meet."[520]

Before the liquidation of the ghetto [in Brześć in October 1942] the Jewish underground had links with the group headed by Sashka "of the golden teeth", that represented themselves as Soviet partisans. Only afterwards did it become clear that this was a gang of thieves that would meet those that fled to the forest, to rob them of their clothing, boots, and arms and then murder them. The majority of those who managed to flee the city during the liquidation met a similar fate. Only very few managed to avoid the hands of Sashka and his murderous hooligans …[521]

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[517] Yerachmiel Moorstein, ed., *Zelva Memorial Book* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Jacob Solomon Berger, 1992), 73. The execution of Feyge (Fanya) Shelovsky and Bella Becker, for discarding their rifles during a German siege, is also reported by Eliyahu Kovensky, "The Path of Suffering and Heroism," in Lashowitz, *Volkovysk,* 134, Part III of *The Volkovysk Memorial Book.* Allegedly, non-Jewish partisans who had left their weapons behind were not punished. Another Jewish partisan describes other anti-Semitic incidents on the part of Russian partisans, revenge killings of "a number of Jew-haters," as well as a raid on "a large estate, whose owner was [allegedly] known to be friendly to the Germans." Katriel Lashowitz, "Thanks to a Broken Machine Gun," in ibid., 138. Michael Kwiat also mentions the execution of Shelovsky and Becker, as well as the execution of two young Jewish men, the Alyovich brothers, for falling asleep while on sentry duty. Allegedly it was rare for non-Jews to be sentenced to death for such infractions. Se *Dereczin,* 304, 309.

[518] Testimony of Lidia Brown-Abramson in Tec, *Resilience and Courage*, 293.

[519] Tec, *Defiance,* 99.

[520] Tec, *Defiance,* 70.

[521] "Brest" in in Shmuel Spector, ed., *Pinkas Hakehillot: Polin,* vol. 5 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1990), 226–37; English translation: *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland,* vol. V, Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol5_00226.html>.

Without convening the High Command or following official procedures, [Commander Boris] Bullat used his tribunal powers to punish fellow Partisans for breaking the rules of the Underground. Two Derechin [Dereczyn] girls, Bella Becker and Feigeh Shelubski, he indicted immediately for discarding their ammunition magazines. He sentenced them to death by firing squad. …

I had my own problems with Bulat's baseless, spiteful attitude toward the Jewish Partisans. …

While we were returning, we saw yet more proof that anti-Semitism was thriving in the Underground. We encountered four Partisans from Bullak's company, who demanded we hand over to them our boots and automatic weapons. … The rider, who was from Zaicev's command, ordered the bandits to report to the staff commander … In the end they escaped punishment …

Jews were accused of specific crimes against locals such as rape and robbery, as well as discarding weapons. Some of the Jewish Partisans, whether they were guilty or not, wehether the crimes had even taken place or not, would be executed for them.[522]

On January 1943 we joined the general Soviet partisan group of 200, the Kirov group. The Jewish fighters were scattered among many fighting brigades. …

After the unification of all the partisans we felt right away a disrespectful attitude towards the Jewish fighters. It was definitely an anti-Semitic bias. They tried to minimize our devotion, dedicated [sic] and heroism in battle. It became known to us that 5 fighters from the town of Lachwa [Łachwa], Binyamin Zalmanowitz, two brothers Walachjanski and 2 brothers Shulan were shot without cause or reason by a partisan group under the leadership of a commander Kubasoff.

Before this groups [sic] murder a Jewish partisan from Lachwa, Hershel Muravnik, that we excluded from our group for disciplinary reasons, was murdered on the order of Commander Ivanoff (Lisowitz) and division head Rufeyer. In June–July 1943, the Soviet partisans under the command of the above Ivanoff executed a Jew from Lachwa Nachum Muravchieck, the killer was Wolodia Poliakoff. The official reason for the murder was given: discipline violation and former member of the ghetto police. The true reason for this wantom [sic] murder was that when Muravchick joined the partisan group he gave the commander a few gold coins, and the murders [sic] did not want this to be known, they killed him.

The Jews in these partisan groups were treated badly …[523]

The fatal day arrived, the day of the Red Army, the 23rd of February [1943]. Early in the morning we heard knocking. Two Russian partisans asked my husband [Yaakov Rudnicki, a dentist] and Dr. [Mark] Berkman to come to their dwelling, because a third partisan, Vania, had been injured during the night operation. Without any suspicion, they went with the partisans in their sledge. My brother in law Meir [Rudnicki] stayed with us. A few minutes later we heard machine gun shots. We knew it was bad news. Did the Germans attack them? We had no other thought. …

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[522] Zissman, *The Warriors,* 127–29, 135.

[523] Itzchak Lichtenberg, "Partisans at War," in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 2 (1985), 594. See also Izak Lichtenberg's testimony in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 4, 338; Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2441. A Jewish survivor from Łachwa accuses the Kirov detachment under Savitskii (Petrovich) of killing 120 Jews. See the testimony of Leja Romanowska in *Roszkowski, Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 231.

Meir took his rifle and went to stand guard. Tamara [Zyskind] and I followed him … My brother in law went further and suddenly we heard a horrific cry. They killed my brother [in law], I thought. Tamara and I started to run away … We walked a few meters away from our bunker, when we heard the call of the two partisans, who only a short while ago took my husband and Dr. Berkman to the injured friend. I approached them first. With a pistol directed at my heart they ordered me to climb on the sledge, which stood beside our bunker. I started to ask questions: what were the shots? Where were my husband and his friend? Dr. Tamara, who was usually brave and cool, lost her head, could not utter a word and pulled me to the sledge. An unusual strength came over me, strength out of desperation. I started to ask about the fate of my husband, Dr. Berkman and my brother in law. One of them blurted out: "we killed everyone and we will kill you too, today is the Red Army day, we received an order to kill all Jews." I had a flicker of hope that one of the men was still alive, and it gave me the urge to go on questioning and talking. … Both were drunk, they smelt of spirits. Till today I cannot believe the coolness with which I manipulate [sic] them. Calm and relaxed I promised them that we would come to them, but only in the evening. I advised them to go home and sleep, rest for a while, and we would wait for them to come and pick us up. I explained to them that women cannot survive in the forest alone, and that we did not know the surroundings and wouldn't move without them. They accepted it, and told us to wait till the evening. …

They left the bunker and we set out in the snow desperate, with no hope and not knowing what to do. We saw in the deep snow prints of man's boots. We got up and ran towards them. It was my husband, who was rushing to help us. He was stunned, tired and broken. His words were: "they killed Dr. Berkman, his head fell on my shoulder, where is my brother Meir? A miracle saved me, I managed to knock Sasha's hand (that was the partisan's name) and his revolver dropped to the ground, the second man was the driver of the sledge and had no weapon, Sasha (the partisan) took the machine gun, but I managed to jump into the forest, hung my coat on one of the trees, they shot at it thinking that it was me. In the meantime, I returned to you. Where is my brother?" those were short, broken and terrible sentences. We told him the atrocious news that his brother was murdered. … Only one rifle with a broken barrel was left in the bunker. I picked it up and we started to walk away from the bunker. Where to go? It was a clear day. Broken, shattered and fatigued we walked, leaving behind brothers and friends, sacred corpses. We could not even bury them. We could not come close to them, lest we would also be killed. After a short time we heard deafening shots from the direction of the bunker. It seemed that the murderers regretted leaving us and came back to pick us up. Thanks to the dense forest we managed to escape.[524]

In March of 1943 the high command of the [Zhukov] unit ordered that the civilian camp be left behind, as the combatants moved to another area; the Jewish fighters were assigned to remain with the families. …

The commander of our unit was none too happy to see us. A few days later we were ordered to leave and make our way to another forest—without weapons. …

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[524] Lyuba Rudnicki, "Outside of the Ghetto," in Yerushalmi, *Navaredok Memorial Book,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Novogrudok/Novogrudok.html>, 246 ff. See also, Tec, *Defiance,* 59–60.

Again we found that the command of the partisans was determined to be rid of us. We were even accused of stealing food from the partisans and threatened with execution if we didn't "confess". … we were beaten, in good Nazi fashion.[525]

As the Spring [of 1943] was approaching … It was clear that … [the Iwie Jewish partisan group] must unite with the large, well-armed Russian partisan group in the Nalibok [Naliboki] wasteland.

For that goal, four brave partisans went out: Shepsl Sheftel, Sender Bielavski (Ivye), Leyb Kalmanovitsh, Hirshke Levkovitsh (Trab). They succeeded in getting an assurance that the whole group would be taken into a new detachment, "Aleksander Nievski", which was being organized. Happily, they turned back to bring the group.

On the way, near the little town Olenieve [?], they encountered a Russian "wild" partisan group, "Antonovtses" (from the name of their leader, Anton), that did not conduct any war activities, but was only busy eating, drinking and robbing. They were incited by the peasants, who said that the Jewish partisans robbed them. They took the four rifles and everything that was on the wagons (food and supplies) [doubtless these were the spoils of a raid on a village—*M.P.*], and let them go free. But figuring that without rifles the other detachment would not take them in, they went back and demanded the four rifles. … The "Antonovtses" took them into a house, made them undress, tortured them and drove them out naked to the local cemetery and shot them there.[526]

In the spring of 1943 groups of Jewish people from the Ghetto Vilna [Wilno] escaped to the woods. The Russian headquarter [sic] decided to organize an all Jewish Unit. The unit was constantly evolving. The first leader was Botianitz, and then he was replaced by Bomka Bialsky. The last was Vlodka Salovitz. Vlodka was not Jewish. He was an anti-Semite who took all the jewelry from the members saying that it would be sold and the money would be used to fight the Nazis. We sow [sic] his true face in the second blockade [sic] he didn't help the large group of Jews that just escaped from the Vilna Ghetto. The troop was involved in many dangerous missions, but it did not last long. The Soviets did not encourage separatism by religion.[527]

There were several bands of escaped Russian prisoners of war nearby. When the Russians encountered Jews, they would confiscate their weapons and leave them defenseless. …

The family camps were not only vulnerable to betrayal by the Germans and their collaborators. Anti-Semitic partisan groups also operated in the forests. A few months later two new brigades were formed in our forest and they were not friendly at all towards Jews, especially the Zukov [Zhukov] brigade. The Schirokov brigade (for motherland) was a little more friendly. …

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[525] Michael Walzer-Fass and Moshe Kaplan, eds., *Tooretz-Yeremitz: Book of Remembrance* (Tel Aviv: Tooretz-Yeremitz Societies in Israel and the U.S.A., 1977), 94–96.

[526] Account of Meyshe Kaganovitsh in Kaganovich, *In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ivye,* Internet: www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/ivye/.

[527] Account of Shimon Zimmerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

Many of the Jewish partisans attempted to create completely Jewish fighting units in our forest. … None of these groups were successful because the Soviet authorities would not permit Jewish fighting units. They were given an ultimatum: join the Soviet partisans or be disarmed and shot. …

We also had to confront the fact that in our own units there were anti-Semitic Russian prisoners of war who would happily shoot Jews in the back given half the chance.[528]

After that fourth mass murder [in Nowogródek in May 1943] the underground prepared a plan for mass escape. … The head of the organization was Dr. Yaakov Kagan, commander of the underground organization in the ghetto … dug a tunnel of 250 meters, work that continued for 3 months; when it was complete, the underground notified the work camp residents details of the escape plan. On a dark and rainy night, 26 September 1943, 323 people gathered at the entrance to the tunnel; all succeeded to escape but for 70 who got confused within the tunnel and would up back in the city, were caught and executed. … More than 200 Jews succeeded in escaping to the forest. Most of them joined the Belsky Brothers' units and very few to other partisan units. Dr. Kagan's group reached the anti-Semitic Soviet command; they were told to surrender their weapons and were murdered when they refused.[529]

… in May 1943, "partisan Grigorii Rivin, Jewish by nationality, [was] shot because of his systematic spreading of Jewish chauvinism." Rivin's transgression was that he openly and frequently complained that "Jews were not accepted into the [partisan] unit . . . [and that] they were harassed." In June 1943 in Mironka, after a Jewish sentry mistakenly killed a Soviet partisan, the latter's comrades unleashed themselves upon the Jewish patrol, killing seven of its members. In the wake of such occurrences, the supreme command of the Soviet partisan Stalin Brigade announced that the "spreading of Jewish chauvinism and, equally, of anti-Semitism is a fascist method to destroy the partisan vigilance." The former was punished seriously, while the latter appears chiefly to have been denounced verbally.[530]

Commander Danilov, who had all of one Jew named Jaszka in his unit, gave the order to kill Jews. The partisans of the Danilov unit started to carry out their commander's order. They killed every Jew they encountered, whether a partisan or living in a group. They managed to kill 10 to 12 Jews. Drunken partisans approached forest dugouts, where about 60 Jews lived, and started to shoot from a distance yelling "Away with the Jews." These Jews grasped what was happening and escaped in time. In the entire area it was said that the partisans were looking for Jews and killing them.[531]

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[528] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 108, 159, 200, 210.

[529] "Novogrudok," in Shmuel Spector and Bracha Freundlich, eds., *Pinkas Hakehillot: Polin,* vol. 8 (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 430–37; English translation: *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland,* vol. VIII, Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol8_00430.html>.

[530] Marek J. Chodakiewicz's review in *Sarmatian Review,* no. 2 (April) 2006: 1217–20 of Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen in Weißrußland,* 190, 192.

[531] Testimony of Berko Berkowicz, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/564.

Captain Babakov [Nikolai Bobkov], the leader of the partisans in the Różana forest (the so-called Słonim partisans), was a very brave partisan, which did not stop him from hating Jews and mudering them, allegedly as an unsure element. Among others, when a small group of Jews from Białystok arrived in the Rożana forest in September 1943 after the liquidation of the Białystok ghetto, and were detained by Babakov's partisans, he simply ordered them to be shot. There were five men and one woman.[532]

On the night of November 25, [1943], while waiting for Radionov in Murine-Voke [?], some of the [Soviet] prisoners-of-war got drunk and their voices could be heard from some distance. This could have drawn the attention of undesirable "guests" and endanger the entire company. Elijau Olkin, who stood on guard, went to calm the noisemakers. He knocked at the door of the house. It was completely dark outside. The door opened and a shot was heard—the bullet entered Olkin's stomach and he was badly wounded. He was in dreadful pain and asked to be shot to death. When they were about to move, they shot him. This marked the end of Elijau (Liushka) Olkin, the commander, the fighter of the ghetto, the devoted and gifted member of AKO.[533]

When we went on a food expedition to the village, all the others would go inside the house, and we [Mina Volkowiski and Musia, another Jewish woman] had to guard the place and the horses. Musia was shot. I was saved by a miracle. …

She was asked to clean, and she refused. So they denounced her at the headquarters. Gusev, the anti-Semitic commissar, came to investigate and called it [her refusal] sabotage. There was an order that the two of us had to be killed. One of the guys went for a walk with Musia and shot her. Another partisan had an order to kill me. … He could not do it.[534]

How they mistreated Jews! … They would kill Jews, rob them, and mistreat them in many, many ways. Whenever we had a Jewish boy, he would have to do the worst jobs. The Jews were terribly humiliated … At one point, around 1944, the Germans supplied arms to a few villages so that they could defend themselves against the partisans [i.e., against partisan raids]. They called it self-defense. Bobkov, our commander, gave an order to burn one such village. Among those who left was a Jewish boy from Byten [Byteń] … In the morning they came back and reported that the whole village was destroyed, but one of the partisans, the Jews, had not wanted to take part, so they shot him.[535]

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[532] Testimony of Jasza Klin, November 17, 1946 (Jewish Historical Commission, Białystok), Yad Vashem Archives, file M-49E/2002, as cited in Musial, *Sowjetische Partisanen 1941–1944,* 392. See also Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 342–57.

[533] Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945,* 235.

[534] Testimony of Mina Volkowiski in Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 310.

[535] Testimony of Mina Volkowiski in ibid., 296.

> … a horrible event was carried out by the same group of partisans led by Vanika [Plantovski], the murderer. This group was nicknamed *Automattiki,* because most of them carried automatic rifles.
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> One hot day, we were once again surrounded by the Vanika group of partisans. We were ordered to line up without our arms. … Vanika didn't explain the reason for the raid. He ordered all of the Jews to step out in front of the line, and he read more names from a list. …
>
> As soon as the two women were guided to the side, the merciless Vanika called out, "*Poost zseevot,*" *Let them live.* This phrase was a code to the gunman to shoot! Within a second, several partisans fell to the ground, wriggling in their agony: the Jew, Meyer; the couple; and one other. The murderer ordered three other partisans and me to dig a mass grave, while the gunman finished up the job of killing them.[536]

> One evening in June, 1944, when I returned from an assignment, I strolled over to the Hungarian tents. [These were Hungarian Jews, prisoners of Hungarian soldiers stationed in the area, who escaped and were found by some Soviet-Jewish partisans. *M.P.*] I noticed that a few were missing. The partisans told me that, in the afternoon, the platoon leader, Grisha, had lined them up, and from his talking and gestures, they had understood that he was asking who among them wanted to go on a sabotage job. … he had picked three fellows. They had left with him and another five partisans. … The following day at noontime, Grisha and the other five partisans returned without the three Jews. … he babbled that they had run into a *zasada* (a trap) and during the fight with the Germans, they had been killed. No one believed him. My superior gave orders to arrest all six of the men who had participated in the mission. He ordered three of them to take off their shoes. They were the shoes the victims had worn. The six were questioned by the brigade commander, by the Politrook (political leader), and also by the captain. They admitted that after returning from their mission of burning a bridge, three of them had become jealous of the Jews who were wearing almost new army shoes, so they had shot them to death.[537]

On disbanding the Jewish 51st Brigade of the Shchors detachment, and stripping the fighters of their weapons and dispersing them, anti-Semitism had surfaced in the following incidents:

1. A Jewish girl, against orders from Moscow, kept a ring from her mother thought to be made of gold. She was shot.
2. A Jewish fighter lost his rifle by accident and was shot.
3. Three scouts charged a Belorussian forest worker with spying for the Germans and shot him. Later it turned out that the forest worker was a friend of the commander and that the allegation was made by a provocateur from the German side. Of the three scouts, the one Jew was shot.
4. The local Komsomol leader wanted the wristwatch of a Jewish fighter, and when the man did

[536] Sorid, *One More Miracle,* 67–68.

[537] Sorid, *One More Miracle,* 90.

not present it to him, he shot him.[538]

There are many other similar cases involving expendable Jews, and Jewish women were lucky simply to be expelled from Soviet partisan units.

> Eliyahu Tziklik escaped from the town of Lenin [Łunin] and joined the Ivanov Partisan battalion. He excelled at every mission they gave him, despite being 55 years old. However, when the Germans laid siege on their base, his commander refused to let Tziklik retreat along with the rest of the battalion, because of his age. Not wanting to die, Tziklik pleaded that they take him with them. But the commander did not budge in his decision—he would not have an old Jew risk his and his men's chances of getting to safety. He shot and killed Tziklik and left with his men.[539]

> Some of the first Partisans to join the Misyora unit were a number of young Jewish women, who cooked and cleaned for the unit and took care of the wounded after battle. They worked hard and were treated well. However, when a new commander took over the unit, attitudes toward the women changed.
>
> "One day," Alek Abugov recalls, "and order came from the central command and from our kommissar to get rid of all the Jewish women within 24 hours. I went to protest the order and explained that it was neither logical nor justified: The work of the Jewish women was important—they took care of the wounded—and no one had the right to expel them from the unit, which would be sentencing them to certain death. Unfortunately, I found that my explanations did not convince anyone. Rather, I was notified that I, too, must leave the unit. The news quickly spread throughout the unit, and my scouts as well as a few other Partisans joined me. Twenty-seven people gathered together with me, including the women, and that night we left the unit. We were armed with rifles. It was too dangerous to remain in the area, and so we left the forest for the territory of Diadia Patia ("Uncle Patia") unit."[540]

Surprisingly, there are still leading historians like Christian Gerlach who are in denial about the activities of Soviet partisans toward Jews, and even whitewash them. (Gerlach refers to them as "pro-Soviet guerrillas" even though they were part of the Soviet partisan movement.) Not surprisingly, these same historians also fault the Poles for initiating the conflict with the Soviets.

> Among pro-Soviet guerrillas in Lithuania there were *few* assaults against Jews, and some of these were punished. For Lithuanian Jewish partisans, the greater threats were Polish nationalist underground fighters and Lithuanian farmers. But some of the units that fled to neighboring Belarus

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[538] Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Destruction and Resistance: The Jewish Shtetl of Slonim, 1941–44," in Thurston and Bonwetsch, *The People's War,* 43.

[539] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 41.

[540] Barmatz, *Heroism in the Forest,* 41.

> were disarmed by pro-Soviet guerrillas, dissolved, and their members thereby endangered; whereas the Soviet partisan movement helped protect large groups of Jewish refugees. [empasis added]
>
> In Belarus ... the conflict intensified, in 1943, when pro-Soviet partisans arrived in the region and the three groups [i.e., Belorussian collaborators, the Polish Home Army and Soviet partisans] fought each other, as they did in Lithuania. In September 1943, Polish Home Army units were ordered to attack all Soviet and Jewish partisans units.[541]

If armed Jewish partisans experienced such problems with the Soviets, the situation for non-partisans and stragglers was often far worse. As Nechama Tec points out, among the runaway Jews many were older people, women, and children. Soviet deserters and former POWs would often deliver these unarmed, helpless Jews to the German authorities, or they would themselves kill them. The Soviet authorities made no effort to protect the Jews.[542] Of the Jewish women accepted into Soviet units "the majority became mistresses of partisans, usually officers."[543] Rapes of Jewish women, including those attached to partisan units, by Soviet partisans were commonplace.[544] A member of a partisan unit in the Lipiczany forest recalled how Jewish women hiding in the forest were set upon by Soviet partisans.[545] Another partisan from the Lipiczany forest stated that Jewish women could be endangered by leaders no less than by the partisan ranks:

> Our very first Russian chief was an ignorant and stupid man. He cursed the Jews in his drunken state. It was difficult to protect the Jewish women from his ever-active sex drive, especially when he went on a drinking binge.[546]
>
> Acts of anti-Semitism occurred on a daily basis, as Jews were singled out by the Russian partisans as objects of suspicion and hatred. … In one of the large Russian brigades in our forest, some eighty

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[541] Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews,* 364, 307.

[542] Tec, *Defiance,* 67; Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 184.

[543] Tec, *Defiance,* 156.

[544] Fanny Sołomian-Łoc, *Getto i gwiazdy* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1993), 113–14. This memoir was published in English as *Woman Facing the Gallows* (Amherst, Massachusetts: Wordpro, 1981). The author is also cited below as Fani Solomian Lotz.

[545] Malach Zuckerkop, "The Second World War," in Shimon Kanc, ed., *Yizker-bukh tsum fareybikn dem ondenk fun der khorev-gevorner yiddisher kehile Ryki* (Tel Aviv: Ryki Societies in Israel, Canada, Los Angeles, France, and Brazil, 1973), 505ff.

[546] Miriam Brysk, *Amidst the Shadows of Trees* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Yellow Star Press, 2007), 81. The author was born Miriam Miasnik in Warsaw in 1935 to a doctor. The family fled to Soviet-occupied Lida at the start of the war. They escaped from the ghetto and joined the Soviet partisans in December 1942. Her father ran a forest hospital staffed by Jewish doctors and nurses.

> Jewish women were accused by the Russian high command of being derelict in carrying out orders, and also of stealing. They were threatened with expulsion from the brigade. Expulsion had dire consequences as it meant giving up their guns and, therefore, any ability to defend themselves. The women turned to my father to help clear them of the wrongdoing of others. Papa met with the high command to plead their case. Exasperated, he threatened to quit the hospital if the Jewish women were punished.[547]

Chaim Lazar records copious examples of Soviet duplicity and treachery in Narocz forest in the late summer and fall of 1943, including robbery, set-ups and outright murders of Jewish partisans.

> The initial romantic period did not last long. … the Soviet partisans were beginning to show great interest in our guns [brought with them from the Wilno ghetto]. … We wanted to take advantage of the opportunity and to give them our guns in exchange for a promise that in a day or two they would bring us rifles. … But after a short time we learned that the partisans did not keep their word. They did not bring the promised rifles—and this was still during the relatively idyllic period, in comparison with what was to follow. …
>
> Every day there were incidents of robbery in the forest. At first we did not understand what was going on. One of our boys returned to camp barefooted. He said that he had met up with Russian partisans in the woods and they ordered him to take off his boots. While one took his gun, another removed his watch. There were incidents of murder as well. Several Jews were found dead in various places in the forest. There were also more and more cases of anti-Jewish outbursts. Insult, scorn, and ridicule were the daily bread of the Jewish fighters. We complained to the High Command but nothing came of it. …
>
> One day an official announcement came from Markov's headquarters that by order from Moscow all the separate national battalions must be disbanded, and first of all, the Jewish battalion. Its name was changed from "Vengeance" ["Revenge"] to "Komsomolsk" and the Jewish command was replaced by a non-Jewish one. …
>
> One day all the Jews were lined up and led to Markov's headquarters. They were met by a strong guard. One by one the Jews were led to the Headquarters cabin. … Each and every one of the Jews was told that because the times were growing harder from day to day and there were not enough arms for the experienced fighters, the Jews must hand over their arms, and all their money and valuables to buy more arms. Each of them was searched. Their boots were removed, their good clothes taken away, and their valuables were confiscated. … Some hours later one could see a whole mourning procession of several hundred half-naked Jews, without arms and fearful for their future. … Afterwards, the Jews saw the girlfriends of the Soviet commanders ans commissars sporting the clothes taken from the Jewish woman partisans and wearing watches taken from the Jews. …

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[547] Brysk, *Amidst the Shadows of Trees,* 88–89. Regarding anti-Semitism among Soviet partisans in Lipiczany forest, see also the testimony of Ludwik Ferstenberg, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/3982, as cited in Michał Czajka, Marta Janczewska, and Apolonia Umińska-Keff, eds., *Relacje z czasów Zagłady Inwentarz: Archiwum ŻIH IN-B, zespół 301, Nr. 3001–4000 / Holocaust Survivor Testimonies Catalogue: Jewish Historical Institute Archives, Record Group 301, No. 3001–4000* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy, 2005), vol. 4, 367.

> Thousands of partisans began to leave the forest [in anticipation of a large German raid]. … But the Jews were left to their own devices. No one was interested in their fate. … Their request to receive arms or join partisan units leaving for other areas met with no response. Derisive remarks were made about the Jews and their bravery. Several Jews who tried to join the departees were shot and killed. Only a handful succeeded in being accepted by the departing units. …
> [Lazar then describes a trap that 35 Jews fell into, laid by Henoch Ziman, a Jewish Communist code-named "Jurgis," which resulted in all but one of the Jews being killed by the Germans.]
>
> One day a company went on a food foray to a Lithuanian village … On the way the Jewish fighters encountered the Russian partisans of Mishka Capitan, who were also going to one of the villages on a similar mission. … But just as they were about to leave the village, the Russian partisans began shooting … They pointed their guns at the Jew and wounded him mortally. … Shapiro fell not from enemy bullets but from the bullets of "brothers-in-arms." …
>
> One day there appeared in our new camp two partisans from Russka Forest [Puszcza Ruska]. … They said that the commanders in Rudnik [Rudniki] Forest apparently wanted to get rid of superfluous people and, therefore, had sent them to an enemy-ridden area, knowing full well that we would never return. …
>
> Hundreds of Jews from Vilna [Wilno] and the surroundings were in Narocz Forest when the Germans launched a major attack on the forests in the autumn of 1943. … After the non-Jewish partisans took away their arms, these Jews remained defenseless. … About one hundred Jews died in the forests in various ways during the German siege.
>
> When the partisans returned after the siege, the Jews tried hard to be accepted into the partisan ranks, but they were rejected. Without alternative, the Jews set up their own camp …[548]

Jewish partisans, such Rachel Margolis, accuse Markov's brigade of being outright thieves. Not only did they confiscate weapons from Jewish partisans, but also took all their valuables such as money, watches, and leather jackets. When she later visited a senior officer of the Chapayev unit she saw that the leadership had hoarded bags full of confiscated loot for themselves.[549] Other memoirs are equally telling:

> The staff of the Frunze brigade kept thinking up new ways to discredit our Jewish detachment. … The three of us—the Commander, the Chief-of-Staff and I—drew up a statement for the regional staff in which we described the situation in the Frunze brigade, including the inaction of the brigade staff and its discriminatory acts against the Jewish partisans. …
>
> I then proceed to read the statement we had prepared for General Platon, the regional commander. I had almost finished when a bullet whizzed past me and lodged in Golitzev's shoulder. …
>
> We never learned who fired the shot. … But then one day I received a signal from the sole "survivor" of the mobilized young Poles [from the Minsk region]. He had been under my command for a time and was then appointed Komsomol organizer for the brigade staff. What he told me—no more and no less—was that they were arranging to finish me off. During a so-called ambush, a

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[548] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 120–21, 122, 123–24, 143, 144, 158–59, 161, 175–76.

[549] Margolis, *A Partisan from Vilna,* 387, 389.

> police bullet would "take care of me." The police group would actually be a company of partisans, under orders to shoot to kill because we were really enemy agents in disguise.[550]
>
> On the eve of the manhunt of 1943, twenty-two Jewish fighters from the Orlanski detachment found refuge in the Bielski camp. They came because they had been exposed to anti-Semitic threats.
>
> In a different way the Bielski otriad saved the lives of the Kesler group. They had come to the Bielski detachment reluctantly, but if they had refused to join they would have been killed by the Victor Panchenko [Viktor Panchenkov] group. These examples represent only a fraction of the Jews who were protected from the Russian partisan threat.[551]

Jewish partisans were often robbed by their Soviet commanders and were punished severely for transgressions that were tolerated if committed by non-Jews:

> A Belorussian in charge of the guards accused two Jewish partisans of dozing while on sentry duty. … They were sentenced to death and within ten minutes they were shot.
>
> A week later [Commander] Volodka ordered everybody, which really meant the Jews, to turn in all their valuables, such as gold, watches, and money, so that he could buy more weapons for the otriad. We were called to the headquarters one by one and had to enter unarmed. There, under the watchful eye of Volodka and to the accompaniment of verbal anti-Semitic attacks, we were searched and stripped of anything that was considered of any value. This felt more like being searched by Germans than by fellow partisans. … we complained to the commissar about this disgraceful behavior. He just laughed and said, "We are collecting all this to buy arms for you. Knowing you would not willingly give up your possessions we had to take them by force."
>
> The Jews never got the promised arms, and the valuables went to Volodka and his gang, of which the commissar was a part.[552]
>
> Hennik, my brother David's aide, went against David's advice to go to one of the peasants to get clothing. He did not pay for the garments. He claimed it as though it was his right. …
>
> The peasant he took the clothing from was a contact for another partisan brigade made up of Soviet soldiers who had escaped after being prisoners of war.
>
> Different partisan groups had zones under their own control. Other partisans were not allowed to take anything except food from these areas. This particular peasant was a vauable spy for the Soviet group.
>
> … It did not take long for the man to report Hennik's thievery to the Soviet partisans.

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[550] Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto,* 134–35.

[551] Tec, *Defiance,* 207.

[552] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 146.

> Within days, a few people from the intelligence unit of the Soviet brigade came to the camp. They wanted to put Hennik on trial. David [Bobrow] and several others tried to intervene, but our group was much smaller than the other partisan group, and they had much better weapons. …
>
> Hennik's wife ran up crying and screaming. …
>
> The Soviet partisans took Hennik away and within an hour, they tried him, convicted him, and shot him.[553]

> … one Jewish woman in [the Staritzky Brigade] camp was recently executed for having sexual relations after being warned to stop. The woman apparently was spreading a venereal disease, which had incapacitated several men in the brigade. Mina says, "being a Jewish woman, its [sic] best to keep out of the way and away from trouble and do what you're told."[554]

The Jews who formed family camps attempted to affiliate with or secure the protection of Soviet-Jewish partisan units, though not always with success. The non-Jewish elements often bitterly opposed their acceptance. Sometimes the opposition came from the Jewish partisans themselves. Abba Kovner, who escaped from the Wilno ghetto together with members of the pro-Soviet Hashomer Hatsair to join the Soviet partisans, excluded by force Betar (Zionist Revisionist) members, as well as those who did not have weapons.[555] Chaim Lazar describes some of these incidents—which appear to have been edited out of the English translation—in the Hebrew original of his book *Destruction and Resistance:*

> Into the forest arrive two women. One of them brings with her a son and daughter. For many weeks they wandered on the roads. They heard that in the forest there were Jews from Vilna [Wilno] and they hoped that they would have mercy on them and take them into the camp, but they are mistaken. For a few weeks they remain at the edge of the forest—starving, ragged and trembling from cold—but the staff of the division doesn't have compassion for them. Several times they threaten them that if they don't leave the place, they will shoot. Several times the staff sends men to herd these unfortunate women and children far into the forest and forsake them there, but the youths do not comply with the cruel orders, occasionally bringing them some necessities—in secret, of course, so that it would not, God forbid, be discovered by the commander [i.e., Abba Kovner].
>
> In the camp, they remember the day that a group of Jews from Ishishuk [Ejszyszki] came to the forest. They had been sheltered by farmers, until the danger of their being discovered became too great and they could not remain in their hiding place. In vain did they plead to be accepted into the camp. The staff members remained firm in their refusal, although they knew that they were actually

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[553] Paper, *Voices from the Forest,* 180–81.

[554] Podberesky, *Never the Last Road,* 81.

[555] Among those who have levelled this charge is Mania Glezer, who escaped from the Wilno ghetto and joined a partisan unit in Rudniki forest commanded by Kovner. See her testimony in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 97, from the Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2517. Baruch Shub (Shuv) also maintains that the FPO was a closed and elitist organization that shunned non-Zionists. See the testimony of Baruch Borka Szub, Internet: <http://sztetl.org.pl>.

> pronouncing a death sentence for these people. For many weeks, these Jews wandered near the Jewish camp, suffering from cold and starvation. Only after the Russian partisan camp absorbed some of them did 'our commander' also agree to absorb the rest.
>
> They also remember the incident involving a woman from Ishishuk—Potzter and her two children, who wandered for a few weeks in the forest in the freezing cold. The boys would bring them stolen food until the staff was forced to give in to popular opinion and accept them.
>
> Three Jews decide to join the Jewish camp and bring with them a Czechoslovakian cannon. The staff members ponder acquiring this precious munition without also having to accept the men. They invite them for a conversation in the staff tent, a commissioner draws a revolver, takes their cannon from them and arrests them. The staff spreads the news that the three are traitors and should be killed. One of them succeeds in fleeing and alerting the commander of a Russian division. The Russians rush to their aid and threaten to attack the Jewish camp. They free the three men, who join their division.[556]

Beniamin Brest, who wandered in the vicinity of Rudniki forest for several months with a group of Jews which included women and older people, recalls that the Jewish partisan unit they came upon agreed to accept only the two young men and refused to accept the others. When this offer was refused, they were turned away from the camp. They then went to a Soviet partisan unit who reluctantly allowed them to remain.[557] Abram Mieszczański accuses Berl Szereszoniewski and Chaim Lazar, the leaders of his Jewish unit, of abandoning partisans thought to be expendable during a mission, leaving them to fend for themselves almost without weapons.[558]

Similar charges have been made about the Bielski group, at least in the initial stages of its formation:

> In November 1942, a group of Jewish fugitives went from the Bielski otriad to the Lipiczańska forest. The group consisted of fugitives from Nowogródek ghetto, non-fighters, with pregnant women and children among them. They arrived at their destination at the beginning of December while a large raid was in progress. Most perished. This group was escorted by six fighters from the Bielski oriad …
>
> … Chaja Bielski … explains that because they came with "children and old people it was decided to bring them to Lipiczańska forest. There were many family camps there. … Each bunker had a leader and none of them wanted to receive them. There were too many people at the time. I am not saying that it was right what we did. We should have built more bunkers and settled them with us."

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[556] Reb Moshe Shonfeld, *The Holocaust Victims Accuse: Documents and Testimony on Jewish War Criminals,* Part 1 (Brooklyn, New York: Neturei Karta of U.S.A., 1977), 33–34. Similar charges have also been levelled against Tuvia Bielski, who some say refused to accept a group of refugees with pregnant women, children, and old people from the Nowogródek ghetto in November 1942, and dispatched them to Lipiczany forest where most of the soon perished in a German raid. See Tec, *Defiance,* 89–90.

[557] Testimony of Beniamin (Benjamin) Brest, dated July 8, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2531, reproduced in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945*, vol. 4, 229–32, at p. 231.

[558] Testimony of Abram Mieszczański, dated June 10, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2536.

> Motl Berger, who seems to dislike [Lazar] Malbin, blames the incident on him. Motl feels that Malbin talked Tuvia [Bielski] into sending the forty people away from their camp, most of whom were unarmed women and children. "These people were told that it would be safer for them in the Lipiczańska. They had no choice, they had to leave …"
>
> Esia Lewin-Shor, a Bielski partisan, … thinks that Tuvia was pressured into sending this group away.[559]

A Jewish forest group in the area of Lipiczany forest refused to accept a Jewish boy of about fifteen they encountered in the forest:

> His entire family had been killed and he was attempting to survive alone in the forest, desperate to find a group to feed him and provide him with refuge. He was brought to our ziemlanka. …
>
> "Please," he begged, "Let me stay into your group, I will do anything you want of me."
>
> The group leader replied, "There is no room or food to spare."
>
> The members of the group knew each other from the ghetto and were unwilling to share their meager food supply with a stranger. The boy began to cry, on his knees, he begged for mercy. My parents tried to intervene on the boy's behalf. It was to no avail. The boy was allowed to dry his clothes by the fire; he was then given some bread and led away by one of the men. He was taken deep into the forest, and a fire was lit to keep him warm. Alone and abandoned, he cried and begged, "No, no, don't leave me here alone to die."
>
> We never saw that boy again.[560]

Velvke Yonson recalled a similar experience:

> He and his friends walked deep into the woods until they were met by a group of Jewish partisans of the Russian Orlanski *otriad* (most likely Jews who were former Red Army soldiers). The fighters interviewed him, but refused to allow him or his friends to join them. Yonson and his group decided to move farther south to the Lipiczany Forest. Near the Schara [Szara] River, not far from Slonim [Słonim], they met another group of Soviet partisans, this one led by a Russian named Vanushka. "It is worth noting," Yonson writes, "that the Jewish partisans sent us away, but the Gentiles accepted us."[561]

Nachum Alpert, a partisan from Słonim, recollects:

> The next morning the 51st unit [of the Shchors detachment] lined up before their new Commander Guzhevski, who was not known for his friendly feelings toward Jews. … From a slip of paper he

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[559] Tec, *Defiance,* 89–90. In some cases, Tuvia Bielski was known to have overruled the opposition of Jewish partisans who did not want to accept non-fighters with families, especially children. See Shor and Zakin, *Essie,* 50.

[560] Brysk, *Amidst the Shadows of Trees,* 64.

[561] Levine, *Fugitives of the Forest,* 116.

read out an announcement: "In order to strengthen the battle-readiness of the detachment, the staff has decided to separate from the 51st group certain elements such as older people, children and women, who are hampering our entire brigade."

With this introduction, he then read a list of names, including Itche and Moyse Gratchuk, Elya and Sarah Osak, Yudl Berkner and his two children, Itche Pinski, Sarah Abramovski, Israel Sokolik, Ponyachek, the three Shepatinskis, 14-year-old Nyutke Shelyubski, Itzkowicz, three young men from Lyubovich [Lubowicze], Vaksman, Abraham Bublicki, Israel Slonimski and ten others—a total of 32 people. Apparently the staff, with the help of some "friends of the Jews," had succeeded in compiling a list of "non-battle-ready" elements, but the real reason was that Guzhevski didn't want too many Jews in his detachment. …

The staff seemed to have forgotten that most of those who were on the list had risked their lives while they were in the ghetto to obtain weapons and clothing for the partisans …

At least they let them take their weapons (including two machine guns) and a supply of ammunition. …

Without a plan and without leadership, their hopes disappointed, the separated group left the encampment without a destination. … they were now faced once more with the prospect of wandering aimlessly through the forest swamps, looking for another partisan group that would accept them. …

The next morning they were dealt another blow: Ten of the men announced that they did not want the responsibility of the women and children and had therefore decided to go out on their own. ... And they disappeared.

So now there were only 21.

But the next morning another seven left—they too did not wish to be burdened with people who were not "battle ready." They argued about weapons, especially the two machine-guns. The argument grew so heated that it almost came to a violent end. …

This group of ten went off on its own into the forest, but the next morning they drove Berkner and his children away, leaving them alone in the swamp. Berkner then found his way back to the original group, where he was received sympathetically. …

For two weeks these 14 desolate human beings subsisted on raw cabbage given to them by peasants in the villages. Their fate now depended solely on blind luck. They no longer even bothered to take security measures. …

A couple of days later two partisans brought them the news: permission had been granted for them to come to the Vasiliyev encampment. They were given directions and instructions, and when they got there they discovered that the two "strong" groups had also been allowed into the camp…

In that terrible inhuman time, even some Jews were committing anti-Semitic acts…[562]

An account by a woman from the Baranowicze region confirms that a similar attitude prevailed there as well:

They were among twenty-five or thirty escapees from the ghetto. Some men had rifles, some had guns. This was a motley crew of desperate men fighting to survive, to stay alive. They were all

[562] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 288–91.

> filthy, covered with lice. The commandant of their group was a young man, Moshe Zalmanowicz. … There was a kind of unconcealed envy when they saw women with children. They were openly opposed to having women and children in their group.[563]

And there was yet another danger lurking—internal rivalries and a lethal power struggle. According to a Jewish Communist,

> Another danger arose from denunciations written by Jewish partisans against their own commanders. On the basis of one such denunciation the inter-regional staff began talking about dismissing Bielski and replacing Zorin with a Russian commander.[564]

That there was fertile ground for competing factions to arise is corroborated by the accounts of Jewish partisans and that of a Polish Communist who had direct contact with the Tuvia Bielski's forest group. Bielski had a checkered career during the war, flirting on and off with the Communist authorities. During the Soviet occupation of Eastern Poland, he became a commissar.[565] He sought a *rapprochement* with the local Soviet partisan commander when he came under their gun for his group's excessive pillaging in the countryside.[566] According to his own testimony, Bielski confronted a Soviet commander about partisans from another brigade who stole what his own partisans had robbed from the peasants.[567] In scenes reminiscent of conditions that prevailed in many ghettos, Józef Marchwiński, who acted as Tuvia Bielski's second in command for a time, as well as his Marchwiński's Jewish wife, described the life of plenty and leisure led by Bielski and his entourage and Bielski's "harem" of well-dressed, attractive women. His

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[563] Benjamin Bender, *Glimpses Through Holocaust and Liberation* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 1995), 96–97.

[564] Smolar, *The Minsk Ghetto,* 129.

[565] Piotr Głuchowski and Marcin Kowalski, "Wymazany Aron Bell," *Gazeta Wyborcza, Duży Format,* June 16, 2008.

[566] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 352–54.

[567] Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 204.

premises were known as the "tsar's palace" by the poor Jews, who often did not have enough to eat.[568] Shmuel Amarant, the historian of the Bielski group, wrote:

> The commanders and their relatives, along with the scouts, were the elite. They galloped on their horses wearing leather coats and breeches high-status clothing with a pistol in their belt. Their wives did the same, riding around in breeches, also armed with a pistol. They behaved like salon ladies, their image reflecting an arrogant self-assurance and personal success. The elite had a kitchen to themselves, and good food, which made them feel even more special.
>
> … The fact stirred up a lot of jealousy and anger, especially among the armed people, who demanded better food.[569]

A Jewish Communist stated that Bielski was eager to accept into the camp people who had gold and other valuables to offer up, but less likely to take in the poor, especially those who had no weapons.[570] Some Jews, like Jack Shepsman, ended up leaving the Bielski camp and joined Soviet partisan units. Shepsman recalled: "I didn't like it there a bit, we didn't have any arms; I had gone there to fight, to *do* something, and they put me in the kitchen—I didn't survive just for that! I had to take revenge for what the Germans

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[568] Józef Marchwiński, *W puszczy nad Niemnem: Wspomnienia z walk partyzanckich na Białorusi w latach 1942–1944,* typescript, Archives of the Wojskowy Instytut Historyczny in Warsaw, sygnatura III/63/91, 153; Testimony of Elżbieta Marchwińska (Estera Świerzewska) in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 260. See also Leon Kalewski, "Kresowe (po)rachunki." *Nasza Polska* (Warsaw), March 15, 2000. For a hagiographic account of Józef Marchwiński's activities see Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4, *Poland,* Part 1, 489–90. For further confirmation of some elements of these accounts see Tec, *Defiance,* 93, 111, 137, 139–41, 163; Tec, "Reflections on Resistance and Gender," in Roth and Maxwell, *Remembering for the Future,* vol. 1, 564; Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 300, 319. Lola Hudes Bell (Bielski), who married Tuvia Bielski's first cousin, Yehuda Bielski, recalled: "I had to endure the indignity of having to hand over my underwear—a very scare and needed article of clothing—to the Bielski leaders before they allowed me into their camp. It was a very large and well organized camp with a powerful hierarchy. … Everyone knew their place." See Y.E. Bell, "They Went To 'Build a Jewish Country'," based on the memoir *One Came Back,* in the words of Lola Hudes Bell as told to Y.E. Bell and L.N. Bell, *The Jewish Press,* May 13, 2008. Lola's husband Yehuda lamented, "They gave the women's underwear they collected to their wives and girlfriends. This was so ugly and low." See Leslie Bell, "The Cousins Bielski," *The Jewish Press,* November 19, 2008. According to that article, before the war Tuvia Bielski was allegedly involved in Yehuda Bielski's sister's death—her head was bashed in with a rock, but this incident was hushed up. Bielski's propensity for violence has been noted by his biographers. In a dispute with a Belorussian neighbour over some land while still a teenager, Bielski recalled: "When he came closer I reached for my scythe and with it hit his. He lost his balance, landing on his back. When he was on the ground, I began to hit him with my hands. Four farmhands came to look. They stood there amused, laughing at the man's misfortune. That day I gave him such a beating that we did not see him for two weeks." See Tec, *Defiance,* 8. When serving in the Polish army, Bielski "asked a cook if he could have a schmeer of chicken fat for his bread, the man responded: 'Get out of here, you scabby Jew.' Without a moment's thought, Tuvia grabbed the man with his right hand and pummeled him with his left. He shoved him against a table and grabbed a large knife—which, despite his anger, he refrained from using. Instead, he picked up a chair and smashed it across the cook's face." See Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 15–16.

[569] Kagan, *Novogrudok,* 209, 211.

[570] Benedykt Szymański, *Oddział ten nie miał dobrego konta…,* typescript, Archives of the Wojskowy Instytut Wojskowy in Warsaw, sygnatura III/63/45, 59. See also Kalewski, "Kresowe (po)rachunki," *Nasza Polska* (Warsaw), March 15, 2000. (Szymański was an assumed name; his actual surname was Scherman. See Lewandowska, *Życie codzienne Wilna w latach II wojny światowej,* 339–40.) Elżbieta Marchwińska (Estera Świerzewska), who joined the Bielski group with her Polish husband, voiced a similar opinion. See Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 260.

had done."[571] After liberation, Bielski demanded a portion of the valuables that members of his group had buried in the forest, and reportedly even killed a Jew who refused to comply.[572]

Another source of danger mentioned in Jewish memoirs was the frequent bickering and thievery among the Jewish forest dwellers, and even occasional murders of fellow Jews.[573] Drunkenness in the partisan ranks was also a serious problem.[574] Partisans wooed women forest dwellers and curried favours by offering gifts of clothing, jewelry, and other items stolen from the peasants.[575] Needless to add, non-Jews they encountered were looked on with suspicion.

> I had a few bizarre encounters with Jewish women who tried to pass as Christians and might have had to pay for this with their lives. Once I met two Jewish women from Minsk who had been caught by partisans and accused of spying, and only after I had questioned them for a long time, because I suspected they were Jewish, did they admit their identity and thus were saved.[576]

> Finally I came upon a path and followed it for hours. Suddenly somebody ordered me to stop. They were two Jews but I remembered Mechnikowski's [her Polish friend from Pińsk] warning not to join Jews, as they were likely to be murdered in the forest, so I told them that I was a Christian and a Pole. Suddenly I heard the one say to the other in Yiddish: "We ought to shorten her by a head's length." They took me to their headquarters. I took off my wet garments to dry them at the fire. Unfortunately my coat caught fire and I exclaimed in Yiddish: "Oy meine shmates brennen—my

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[571] Lyn Smith, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Holocaust* (London: Ebury Press/Random House, 2005), 205.

[572] Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 261. This appears to refer to the murder of Faivl Połoniecki, which is also mentioned in Part 3 of this study.

[573] The following examples refer to the Bielski group: Sutin, *Jack and Rochelle,* 89 (hostility toward a female newcomer), 111–12 (a 17-year-old girl persuaded her 40-year-old mother, whom she considered to be a burden, to drink poison), 116 (theft of hidden jewelry), 166 (theft of gold coins); Frances Dworecki, *Autobiography* (Internet: http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-District/fd-toc.htm, 2002), chapter 2 (Bella Golombiewski was killed by a fellow member of the Bielski partisans who wanted her leather coat). See also Sołomian-Łoc, *Getto i gwiazdy,* 107 (hostility toward a female newcomer), 110–11 (theft of food and clothing among different forest groups). Fani Sołomian-Łoc (Solomian Lotz) eventually joined up with a Soviet partisan group in Polesie with a very unfavourable attitude toward Jews, whom they robbed (ibid., 103–104) and murdered (ibid., 106), and toward women, whom they called "bed fixtures" (ibid., 113–14). She was subsequently transferred to a Polish Communist unit where she worked as a nurse and was treated with respect, albeit with suspicion because she had come from a Soviet unit (ibid., 119). Another memoir, by a Jew who joined a partisan unit in Volhynia commanded by Polish Communist Józef Sobiesiak ("Maks"), who took in many Jewish fighters and extended protection to a Jewish civilian camp, also contrasts the humane treatment accorded to Jews in this Polish formation with the anti-Semitism rampant in the ranks and leadership of Soviet detachments in the area. See Joseph Pell and Fred Rosenbaum, *Taking Risks: A Jewish Youth in the Soviet Partisans and His Unlikely Life in California* (Berkeley, California: Western Jewish History Enter of the Judah L. Magnes Museum and RDR Books, 2004), 65–107, especially 85–86, 96.

[574] See, for example, Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 111, 128, 136, 137.

[575] Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 114, 119, 121, 148–49, 152; Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 316–17.

[576] Account of David Plotnik in Boneh, *History of the Jews of Pinsk,* Part Two, Chapter 5.

> rags are burning," forgetting I was supposed to be a Pole. At that, the Jews said that I must be a spy set upon the partisans by the Germans but luck was with me again. Somebody among the Jewish group called out: "Teacher, what are you doing here?" This was a pupil of mine…[577]

Although Jewish historians make blanket charges that Polish partisans were also killing off Jews, there is often very little concrete information to substantiate that assertion. Nechama Tec, who describes numerous cases of Jews murdered by Soviet partisans and stragglers in her book *Defiance: The Bielski Partisans,* presents virtually no evidence of such activities on the part of Poles. There is ample evidence that Soviet partisans killed many innocent Polish and Belorussian civilians during their endless raids on towns and villages.

[577] Account of Fani Solomian Lotz in Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 316–17.

9. Local Help, Food Forays and Pillaging

As numerous Jewish testimonies confirm, relations between Jews and the Christian majority—both Poles and Belorussians—in the norheastern Borderlands during the interwar period was, on the whole, proper and uneventful.[578] The situation changed dramatically in September 1939, when an explosion of violence was directed mostly against the Poles. (These events are described in Part One of this study.) The Germans turned the western regions of Belorussia into a separate administrative division (*Generalkommissariat Weißruthenien*—Commissioner General's Office for Belorussia) of the *Ostland* (Eastland), which as headed by Wilhelm Kube from September 1941. The German civil administration extended to the level of the *Gebietskommissariate* (Regional Commissioner's Offices). Below this level, the authorities availed themselves of the existing indigenous administrative machinery, albeit the composition of the personnel often underwent major changes, and eventually became thoroughly dependent on Belorussians. German historian Bernard Chiari writes:

> In Belarus, regulations banned Poles from participating in public administration, but official approaches to the solution of practical problems varied. In those cities and villages where many Poles had initially regarded the German invasion as liberation from Soviet rule, the *Wehrmacht* used Polish functionaries in the administration. The arrival of the German civil administration heralded their replacement by Belorussian personnel.

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[578] The following examples from the Wilno region are representative. In Olkieniki, where many Jews played on the local soccer team, "Relations between the Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors were generally correct. Friendly relations developed with some of the peasants in the nearby villages." See Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 232. In Marcinkańce, a small town near the Lithuanian border, which was inhabited mostly by Poles and Jews, "By and large, the economic life of the Jews was prosperous. … The attitude of the Christian population towards their Jewish neighbors was friendly." See L. Koniuchowsky, "The Liquidation of the Jews of Marcinkonis: A Collective Report," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 8 (1953): 206, 208. In Oszmiana, "Jewish farms and villages were scattered like tiny islands in the sea of the native peasants. Yet between the two communities there were good neighbourly relations, there was even friendliness towards each other." See Moshea Becker (Ra'Anana), "Jewish Farmers in Oshmana", in M. Gelbart, ed, *Sefer Zikaron le-kehilat Oshmana* (Tel Aviv: Oshmaner Organization and the Oshmaner Society in the U.S.A., 1969), 22; Internet English translation: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Oshmyany/Oshmyany.html>. In Zdzięcioł, "we were living mixed with them [Christians]. And we we were always, always friendly and so did they. … In our little town, I would say [there was no anti-Semitism] because we had actions [dealings] with the Polish priest. He was very, very good to us … he never let anything to with the anti-semitism or whatever. Sure there was, you know, but basically as a whole we had none. I didn't feel it." See Interview with Sonia Heidocovsky Zissman, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, May 25, 1995, 2. A resident of Dołhinów stated: "We did not feel anti-Semitism on the part of the Christian population." See the testimony of Jofe Gerszon, June 20, 1959, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/1293. Leon Berkowicz, who hails from Baranowicze and was the son of a "successful businessman … well respected in the timber industry," recalls: "I attended a Polish government [high] school and although social contact was almost non-existent, nobody was handicapped because of his origin or his religion. The Jewish boys excelled academically, but if they were usually first in maths and science they were nearly always last in sports. Physical education was a low priority in Jewish upbringing. Somehow, I was an exception and … the sports-master always gave me top marks. … I was very proud when the captain from the 78th Polish infantry regiment asked me to join their soccer team and play for them in Wilno … I had two Christian friends at school … Our relationship was based on mutual respect and understanding. On a few occasions I went to their homes and they came to mine; I had the impression that the parents of both sides raised their eyebrows." See Berk, *Destined to Live,* 3–4. Aharon Arlazoroff, who lived in a mixed neighbourhood of Wilno, stated that in their building Jews and non-Jews lived in relative harmony and did not recall any anti-Semitic incidents. See the testimony of Aharon Arlazoroff, Internet: <http://www.sztetl.org.pl>. The notion that Christian-based anti-Semitism was the determinative factor governing relations between Poles and Jews must be dismissed as an unfounded generalization—one that omits other important components of the equation. Traditional Jewish religious and ethnic-based attitudes toward Poles were also often imbued with bigotry and hostility, no less so than Polish Christian attitudes. See *The Story of Two Shtetls, Brańsk and Ejszyszki* (Toronto and Chicago: The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), Part One, 182–89, and also Mark Paul's greatly expanded study *Traditional Jewish Attitudes Toward Poles,* Internet: <http://www.kpk-toronto.org/obrona-dobrego-imienia/>.

> The district representation (*Rayonvertretungen*) constituted the top level of indigenuous self-administration. The local administration was integrated into the German system of levies-in-kind, and its representatives were threatened with draconian punishment in case of insufficient performance. Largely for this reason the administration was particularly brutal in enforcing German demands. Indigenous mayors shielded their villages from the outside world. Citizens' militias [so-called village "self-defence" units comprised mostly of Belorussians—*M.P.*] sought to protect farms against plunderers.[579]

Because of a lack of qualified Belorussians, Poles initially occupied many positions in the local administration in some areas, but not into the district representation. Soon, however, at the instigation of Belorussian nationalists, who accused them of sabotaging the German war effort, most of the Poles were purged from their positions in favour of Belorussians. The same held true for the local police, from which Poles, especially those who were suspected of having ties to the Polish underground, were largely

[579] Bernhard Chiari, "Has There Been a People's War? The History of the Second World War in Belarus, 60 Years After the Surrender of the *Third Reich*," in Bruno De Wever, Herman Van Goethem, and Nico Wouters, eds., *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939–1945)* (Gent, Belgium: Academia Press, 2006), 231–32.

eliminated.[580] Working for the police in particular was a very risky job. Increasingly, police personnel (*Schutzleute*) who contributed to the escalation of violence became highly exposed to retaliation by the

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[580] Initially, in many areas the Germans recruited Poles (mostly prewar Polish functionaries) for the local administration and police also because of a shortage of qualified Belorussians. Some Poles took up these positions on instructions from the Polish underground in order to regain ground lost under the Soviet occupation, to lessen the harshness of the German occupation, and to infiltrate the German occupation apparatus. See Bogdan Musiał, "Niemiecka polityka narodowościowa w okupowanej Polsce w latach 1939–1945," *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość,* vol. 5 (2004, no. 2): 20. Most of the Poles eventually left or were purged and replaced by Belorussians, starting as early as July 1941. Belorussian nationalists formally accused these Poles of sabotaging the German war effort and anti-Belorussian activities. See Grzybowski, *Pogoń między Orłem Białym, Swastyką i Czerwoną Gwiazdą,* 406–7. At the end of 1941 and in beginning of 1942, Wilhelm Kube, the general commissar, undertook measures designed to eliminate Poles from the local administration and police. Thus the ranks of the auxiliary police came to be filled for the most part by Belorussians. In Dereczyn, for example, the Polish police was cut down by German machine-gun fire and buried in a pit, dug by local Jews, in the woods outside the town. See Zissman, *The Warriors,* 47. Afterwards, Belorussians filled these positions. See *Dereczin,* 250. In Iwacewicze, the Germans "dismissed the Polish policemen, suspecting disloyalty and shot their officers"; Belorussians were then recruited Belorussians into the police, and later, were replaced with Ukrainians. See Leonid Smilovitsky, "The Story of Sarah from Ivatzevichi," *Federation of East European Family History Societies,* vol. 14 (2006): 73. Members of minority groups like the Muslim Tatars also served in the police force. See Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 74, 191. Once Poles were largely eliminated from the police force, as in Baranowicze, the police was used in German operations directed at the Polish elites, who were suspected of supporting the underground, and in the liquidation of the ghettos. According to historian Jerzy Turonek, by the end of 1943, Belorussians occupied 80 percent of the administrative positions and made up 60 percent of the auxiliary policemen in so-called Western Belorussia. (This estimate may be on the low side since Turonek does not provide any hard data to back it.) See Turonek, *Białoruś pod niemiecką okupacją,* 65–66, 185–87; Mironowicz, *Białoruś,* 162; Małgorzata Ruchniewicz, "Stosunki narodowościowe w latach 1939–1948 na obszarze tzw. Zachodniej Białorusi," in Ciesielski, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Kresach Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej 1931–1948,* 289–90. See also the Polish Government's Home Delegate's report regarding the situation in the Białystok district (for the period August 15 to November 15, 1941) in Machcewicz and Persak, *Wokół Jedwabnego,* vol. 2, 147. Martin Dean confirms that Poles were viewed as unreliable and were therefore purged from the local police forces in the fall and winter of 1941–1942. Thereafter, the vast majority of policemen in localities like Mir, Jody, and Baranowicze were Belorussians of the Orthodox religion. However, Dean appears to consider all Roman Catholic policemen to be Poles, whereas in fact many Catholics in that area identified themselves as Belorussians. Dean notes that many Polish policemen were secretly members of the Polish underground organization who had infiltrated the police. Later some of them deserted to join the Polish partisans, and a number of them were shot by the Germans when their clandestine activities were discovered. Their representation in the *Schutzmannschaft* in Belorussia and Ukraine became minuscule as its strength increased dramatically during the course of 1942 from 33,000 in January to more than 150,000 men by December, approximately 40–50,000 of whom served in Belorussia. It was during 1942 and 1943 that the vast majority of Jews were killed in this area. See Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 21, 46, 52, 74; Martin Dean, "Microcosm: Collaboration and Resistance during the Holocaust in the Mir Rayon of Belarus, 1941–1944," in David Gaunt, Paul A. Levine, and Laura Palosuo, eds., *Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust: Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 223–59; Martin Dean, "The 'Local Police' in Nazi-Occupied Belarus and Ukraine as the 'Ideal Type' of Collaboration in Practice, in the Recollections of its Members and in the Verdicts of the Courts," in Joachim Tauber, ed., *"Kollaboration" in Nordosteuropa: Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 419. In another study, Martin Dean estimates that between 10 and 15 percent of the local police in Belorussia were of Polish ethnicity and that in certain districts, such as the area around Lida, Poles had not been replaced with Belorussians by the autumn of 1943. He also states that many Poles were recruited more or less by force from the summer of 1942 for the purpose of reinforcing the police in their struggle against the Soviet partisans, and notes that most of those who were recruited after the liquidation of the ghettos were not directly involved in the persecution of Jews. With respect to Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, Dean grossly exaggerates the number of Poles in the local police and their role in the liquidation of the ghettos. (Poles did not enter the auxiliary police in Volhynia until the spring of 1943, after their villages were attacked and their population massacred by partisans of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which was well after the liquidation of the ghettos.) See Martin Dean, "Poles in the German Local Police in Eastern Poland and their Role in the Holocaust," *Polin,* vol. 18 (2005): 353–66. Israeli historian Leonid Rein points out that after the departure of the Poles, the local police increased in size dramatically from 3,682 men in December 1941 to 6,850 men in April 1943. The auxiliary police increased their role as the extermination process widened and became more visible during the second wave of mass murders, which began in spring 1942 and reached its peak in the summer of that year. In Eastern Belorussia, where there were no Poles in the local administration, the local auxiliary police forces, called the Ordnungsdienst, consisted of 13,000 men in mid-1942, and 12,000 additional

Soviet or Polish underground.[581]

The Holocaust in the Borderlands was in no way dependent on alleged Polish collaboration or complicity. German field reports from northeastern Poland make it clear that, by and large, neither the Polish nor the Belorussian population participated in the harassment, ghettoization and mass executions of the Jewish population.[582] Those tasks were left largely to Lithuanian and Belorussian auxiliaries. Occasionally Poles who served in the local police or militia units, known as the *Miliz, Ordnungdienst,* or *Hilfspolizei*, and later called the *Schutzmannschaft-Einzeldienst,* were employed in operations directed against partisans and Jews, though mostly in peripheral functions. The role of the Judenrats (Jewish councils) and the Jewish ghetto police, which for the most part carried out German orders dutifully, was incomparably more significant and, on the whole, quite negative.[583] German historian Bernhard Chiari states:

> A local police force was intended to compensate for the shortage of German police in the occupied territories. … various indigenous police forces were set up in Belarus. Their initial designation as *Ordnungsdienst* was later changed to that of a *Schutzmannschaft.* Apart from these, the Belorussian SS and police chiefs had a number of mixed or pure Ukrainian, Latvian and Lithuanian police battalions at their disposal. These battalions were continually reinforced during the war and for the most part carried out combat missions against partisans. They were also employed during extermination operations or in "ghetto clearance" operations.[584]

In times of strife, looting of property, especially "abandoned" property, is commonplace. Extensive looting occurred when Jews were expelled from their homes. Many Christians, however, were loathe to take over Jewish property.[585] Despite the creation of ghettos, as long as the Jewish population was not completely isolated, Poles and Belorussians continued to do business with them. Trade with the local population even took on large-scale proportions. In the early stages, in Głębokie,

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[581] Bernhard Chiari, "Has There Been a People's War? The History of the Second World War in Belarus, 60 Years After the Surrender of the *Third Reich*," in De Wever, et al., *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939–1945),* 236.

[582] Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 76.

[583] Evgenij Rosenblat, "Belarus: Specific Features of the Region's Jewish Collaboration and Resistance," in Gaunt, et al., *Collaboration and Resistance During the Holocaust,* 261–82.

[584] Bernhard Chiari, "Has There Been a People's War? The History of the Second World War in Belarus, 60 Years After the Surrender of the *Third Reich*," in De Wever, et al., *Local Government in Occupied Europe (1939–1945),* 235.

[585] For example, in Głębokie: "A goodly portion of the peasants did not want to make the exchange. They would prefer to remain in their own homes, near their fields, their gardens, orchards, barns and stables, where they were born, grew up and lived their lives, rather than go into the expensive, beautiful [Jewish] apartments in the center of the city." See M. and Z. Rajak, *Memorial Book of Gluboke* (Canton, New York, 1994), 46; translation of *Khurbn Glubok…Koziany* (Buenos Aires: Former Residents' Association in Argentina, 1956).

> there was no great starvation in the Ghetto. People took risks, and products were brought in at any price. Also the village peasants used to bring in products such as: potatoes, milk, flour, chick peas, barley and more.[586]

A Jew from Szczuczyn reported that, despite the restrictions imposed on Jews not to trade in the market, not to have any dealings with the Christian population, and not to venture beyond the designated areas in the town,

> They made a living, though dangerous, by exchanging clothes and articles for bread and food with the peasants from the villages and the townspeople. In the beginning, the non-Jews had no special hatred for the Jews. There were even cases of aid and sympathy.[587]

Similarly, in Oszmiana, although the ghetto was out of bounds for non-Jews, "The Polish and White Russian population again established contact with the Jews. Barter-trade flourished."[588]

Contrary to what is often contended, the Jewish population was not necessarily victimized in these transactions. In the view of one Jewish scholar,

> On balance, however, most contacts between the Jewish and Christian neighbors were beneficial. This was particularly true for the exchange of goods. And so, local peasants supplied the Jews with farm products, while the Jews offered the peasants used clothes, furniture, and all kinds of other personal belongings. Both partners to these exchanges were poor. Both were eager to receive the goods the other had. These transactions continued. Even though they reduced starvation among the Jews, they could not eliminate hunger.[589]

As the liquidations of the ghettos proceeded, thousands of Jews escaped and made their way to the forests. On occasion, they received warnings from the local population of impending German actions as was the case in Werenowo.

> The shtetl on the border of Lithuania and Byelorussia was a labor camp until recently. The Jews lived there without a ghetto. … On the eighth of this month [May 1942], a rumor suddenly circulated that the town was surrounded by German gendarmes and the Jewish inhabitants were seriously threatened.
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> On Saturday night the Poles advised the Jews to save themselves. The woman who tells us the story, her husband and three children, and a group of more than 100 persons bribed the Polish

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[586] Rajak, *Memorial Book of Gluboke,* 51.

[587] Testimony of Liber Losh of Szczuczyn, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/4378, O33C.

[588] "The Diary of Hinda Daul," in Gelbart, *Sefer Zikharon le-kehilat Oshmana,* 25 ff.

[589] Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 76.

> policeman and set off for wherever their eyes took them. They walked at night and hid in the forest by day.[590]

Jews who escaped from the ghettos had to turn to the local population for assistance. Leon Salomon, who escaped from Konstantynów in the spring of 1943, described the peasants as poor and frightened, but not hostile.

> I took to the woods. … took me about a week till I finally made contact with partisans. … After being five days in the woods, sleeping in the woods, it was still cold … I was living there, local population gave me bread to eat, yes they were friendly, but they were afraid … to keep me there. And one night I walked into an isolated farmhouse. … I begged her she should let me sleep just to warm up that night and she says I am scared to death, either from the partisans, because partisans were already come around, or from the Germans. But after a while she says okay, and I was sleeping on … the table, in the kitchen. The kitchen was also the living room, you know very primitive.[591]

As illustrated by a collective memoir from the small town of Jody (with fewer than 1,000 people), virtually every Jew who made it to the forests was the beneficiary of Christian aid along the way:

> Although we lived in constant fear of betrayal, I must emphasize that most of the 100 Jews of Jody still alive on New Year's Day 1942 owed their lives to righteous Gentiles who risked their property, their lives and the lives of their families to help Jews survive. Captured Jews were tortured and shot. Gentiles discovered hiding Jews were burned alive with their families and homes. … Every Jew from Jody alive today owes his life to at least one, if not many Gentile families. Every Jew from Jody that survived the Holocaust in the forest and with the partisans was at one time or another hidden in the attic or barn, bunker or basement of some courageous Gentile.[592]

> No luck in the world would have saved us if it were not for the help we received from righteous Gentiles. Some of them [Poles], the Siedziukiewiczs, Lahuns, Konochowiczs [Konachowicz] and Szklianowiczs [Szklaniewicz], let us stay on their farms for weeks and months. They took terrible risks. Their lives and the lives of their families were at stake. Others allowed us to stay during the day; some gave us food or warned us of danger.[593]

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[590] Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania,* 289.

[591] Testimony of Leon Salomon, dated June 18, 1990, Voice/Vision Holocaust Survivor Oral History Archive, University of Michigan-Dearborn, Internet: <http://holocaust.umd.edu/salomon/>.

[592] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 83. This memoir goes on to describe the activities of dozens of local residents, mostly Poles, who assisted the Jews.

[593] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 259.

Before reaching the Bielski partisans, Jews who escaped from the ghettos in Nowogródek, Wasiliszki, Mołczadź, and Lida relied on the help of numerous Christians:

> We stayed alive [in the police station in Nowogródek] thanks to the head of the Polish police. My husband treated his teeth and made a bridge for him. Later we found out that the policeman was in contact with the partisans. We don't know what happened to him. …
>
> At that stage we heard nothing about the partisans. I contacted a Christian woman by the name of Pargowicka. She lived 2 km. From the courthouse, in the village of Selco (Selec) [Sielec]. She was an honest and God fearing woman. I trusted her. I told her everything and asked for help. I was not mistaken; she did help me. She had relatives in the village of Khrapenevo [Chrapieniewo] near Iv'e [Iwie]. She heard that there were Russia soldiers in that area, who had not managed to escape and where hiding in the foresrt. Her readiness to help us was great. She believed that if she saved us, God would bring back her husband, who was taken prisoner by the Germans. She was left with 4 small children. …
>
> We decided to escape from the Ghetto on the 19 of August 1942. Our group consisted of 5 people … We stayed till dark in the barn of Benzlavski, a postman. We had to pass by the Ghetto, there was no other way …
>
> We arrived safely to Mrs. Pargowicka's house. A guide was waiting to take us to Khrapnevo. … (Khrapnevo lays some 25 km north of Novogrudok [Nowogródek] and about 4 km south of the river Neman [Niemen]. It is desolate country, full of swamps and isolated villages.) …
>
> It was a swamp and we had to sit there all day. Only at night were we allowed to sleep at the granary, which was at a distance of 200 meters. A new life started there. The guide's sister, and her kind mother, supplied us with food. We did not hear about the partisans yet.[594]

> After walking for two hours [from Wasiliszki], I came to the village of Artzeshi [Arcisze]. I knocked at the door of strangers, a Christian house and asked for some water and a piece of bread. The Christian gave me both.
>
> Daybreak came when I approached a nearby forest. I hid in the forest for two weeks. During the night, I would go to various Christian homes to get something to eat. Most of the time, they gave me a piece of bread, something cooked and sometimes even a good word.[595]

> When Chatskel came, we discussed our lot and decided to dig a shelter in the ground not far from the house. But at night when they went out to dig the hole they realized that it would not be secure and we decided we would go where Chenia was. That was a crawlspace under a floor in the house of a gentile Polish farmer by the name of "Glatki" [Gładki], where there were seven men and one girl. After spending the night, we went to the owner and begged him to let us stay a couple of days until my wounds could heal. He agreed and treated us as a father would. We stayed 9-1/2 months.

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[594] Lyuba Rudnicki, "Outside of the Ghetto," in Yerushalmi, *Navaredok Memorial Book,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Novogrudok/Novogrudok.html>, 246 ff.

[595] Account of Yehuda Shwartz in Losh, *Sefer zikaron le-kehilot Shtutshin Vasilishki Ostrina Novi Dvor Rozhanka,* 245 [331].

Then we had to leave, because in the village there was already some gossip that there were Jews at Glatki's house. We left the crawlspace and went into the woods where there were partisans.[596]

[After escaping from Nowogródek at the end of September 1943:] My sister, Lisa, took my father under one arm and I took his other arm and the four of us walked and walked until we reached a Polish house. The woman opened the door and recognized us immediately. "Ah, Kushner, you had the fur stores. I'll give you some bread, water, and onions, but you cannot stay here. You must go." She was scared the Germans would kill her if she hid Jews. … This was maybe five miles from town. … The Polish woman gave us an onion and some water and we moved on. The next day we hear that the Germans came to this woman's house and found some Jews that she had hidden. They killed her, her husband, and the Jews. She had hidden seven or eight Jews. Everyone was killed. After we left the Polish woman, we started to walk slowly into the woods. … So we went to another little farm. The woman there knew the [Jewish] farm boy [who accompanied them]. She was a nice woman. She gave us something to eat and let us sleep in the barn for two nights. She brought us potatoes and buttermilk. She was afraid to keep us longer. We left there and headed further to find other farmers who would maybe help us. … We left and went on to another bunch of farms. … Went to a gentile who we knew from before the war. He recognized us and said, "Listen, I'll do everything that I can for you, but you cannot stay with me." He was already hiding other Jews. Somehow Bielski's men knew that there were Jews at this farm because the wagons with the Jewish men came for us. … The men loaded us and the other Jews that the farmer had hid and took us into the woods. … The boys would go out at night and bring back food. They did this by going to Gentile farms and threatening them with guns. The boys would bring back some meat, potatoes, onions, and bread. We had enough food.[597]

Jan Doylitko, a road construction engineer, lived near the village of Ściganie, Nowogródek District … He was acquainted with the Jewish Basist family of Lida. … The Basists sent a note to Doylitko about their material deprivations and asked him if he could help them in any way. Doylitko immediately headed for the ghetto [in Lida] with a sack of food and thereafter he brought the Basists food supplies once every two weeks, helped by his two teenaged children, Stach and Leokadia (later Spiwak [Śpiwak]). … The Doylitkos continued doing this until May 8, 1942, when the Germans conducted a large-scale Aktion in the ghetto, in which they assumed that the Basists had been killed. When they discovered that Aba Basist and his 16-year-old son Chaim were still alive, they suggested that they flee the ghetto and try to join the partisans in the forest. To facilitate their acceptance by the partisans, the Basists needed weapons and Stach eventually managed to smuggle two guns into the ghetto after much effort. Armed with these, Aba and Chaim Basist, as

[596] Account of Tsira Royak (Rabec), "My Personal Experiences," in Ayalon, *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Meytshet,* 314–19.

[597] Interview with Rae Kushner, 1982, Oral History Interviews of the Kean College of New Jersey Holocaust Resource Center, 26–28. This interview contains disparaging references to "Polacks" but ultimately declares, "*even* Polacks and Germans should not be killed because of their religion." Ibid., 37.

> well as their friend Yaakov Druk, and his surviving family members, left the ghetto in autumn 1942, and joined the brigade of Jewish partisans, led by the Bielski brothers.[598]

Jews who escaped from the ghetto in Oszmiana in March 1943 wandered through the countryside for several months begging for food before they joined up with the Soviet partisans.[599] A Jewish boy who hid in underground shelters built in the forests near his hometown of Bielica recalled:

> Some of our best Christian friends that we grew up with risked their lives to enter the ghetto [in nearby Zdzięcioł] in order to bring us food. …
>
> The Jewish police went from house to house, calling to people to go to the marketplace. …
>
> I first approached a lady who was part of the *Judenrat,* but she quickly sent me away yelling, "Don't stay next to us. You don't belong in this group." How badly I wanted to live. I wanted to see my family again. …
>
> His boss, a Polish man, was understanding and sympathetic. He had given Father a key to the flour mill, telling him that in the event of a slaughter he would be welcome to bring the family to hide out there. …
>
> We soon did reach the village [of Nahorodowicze], and he led us to a house isolated somewhat from the village. A gentle knock on the door brought an elderly woman, who, startled, shrieked, "Yoshke! You are still living."
>
> After a frightened look to be sure no one was watching us, she invited us in. She was afraid like all the others. It was understandable. If the Germans were to find Jews in her house, it would mean death. She knew it. Her fright was evident, not only in her face but also in her trembling hands that were barely able to hold anything. …
>
> "How about some food?" the old man asked rather plaintively. It was clear the woman had little, a matter of the poor asking the poor.
>
> The woman brought a huge loaf of bread and some milk. … We ate ravenously while the woman nervously peered out the window. She could not wait for us to leave. …
>
> The family group was made up of women, children, the elderly and married couples; we were not fighting units. We did not have guns to shoot back, so we were almost totally defenseless, especially in the beginning. …
>
> The farmers, especially those we had known from way back, understood our desperate situation. Most of them never denied us; whether out of fear or compassion, they generally provided us, the wanderers, with some bread, cheese or sour milk and sometimes even some chicken. …
>
> My family was fortunate. We had many Christian friends who helped us in many ways. Father would go to the villages and knock on the door of every house, asking for food. Now and then he would meet an old friend and be invited in—despite the great risk—for the warmth of the fire, a

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[598] Doylitko Family, The Righteous Database, Yad Vashem, Internet: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4042662>. In his testimony, Chaim Basist mentions another Pole who came to his assistance, Boltus from Lida. See Chaim Basist, *The Story of the House of Plotnik-Monco-Basist,* December 2008, Internet: <http://museumoffamilyhistory.com/wims-basist-02.htm>.

[599] Testimony of Lejzor Port in Roszkowski, *Zydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 212. Port states that the Soviet partisans took a great deal of livestock from farmers.

> cigarette and talk. He would usually return with some bread, dry cheese and milk—not much, but enough to lighten the heart if not fill the stomach. …
>
> The area where the Bielica Family Group of about 35 members hid seemed relatively safe. It was not located near any strategic area, and we had been successful in avoiding the German forays. Farmers warned us that the enemy would come eventually, and there would be many of them.
>
> We decided to build a cave in a heavily wooded are, an area where the chance of it being discovered was highly unlikely. The top of the cave was covered with wood. … We dug deep into the ground and fashioned the entrance to slope downward. Entry was obtained by slithering in on our bellies.[600]

Kalmen Kartshmer was sheltered by villagers in Jurgielany. When a group of Jews came to the village looking for food, he begged them, "Brothers! Do not take anything from this village. They are good people. I am Jewish and they look out for me; please, take pity on me and leave them alone." Reluctantly, Kalmen joined a forest group of Jews from Dziewieniszki.[601]

It is understandable that partisans and Jews hiding in the forests had to acquire provisions, especially food, to survive and had to turn to the local population—comprised mostly of Poles and Belorussians—for assistance. But, as we shall see, assisting undisciplined and often violent groups subordinated to a powerful underground (i.e., the Soviets), whose ultimate aim was not simply the defeat of Nazi Germany but also the subjugation of Poland, had its limits. Initially, the peasants weren't generally hostile toward those who sought casual assistance, even though they were very poor themselves and did not have much left over once they met the burdensome food delivery quotas imposed by the Germans. This was so notwithstanding the threat of death that was meted out to anyone who extended a helping hand to Jews. As the German terror intensified, however, most of the population was simply too poor and too frightened to provide assistance for extended periods of timed. As one Jew who was sheltered by Christians in the vicinity of Słonim put it, "Of course they starved, and we starved together with them."[602]

Shalom Yoran (then Selim Sznycer) was employed as an interpreter for the SS. He provides a rather unsympathetic and skewed description of the villagers near Kurzeniec on whom a food gathering expedition descended.

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[600] Lazowski, *Faith and Destiny,* 35, 39, 43, 56, 91–92, 97, 105–6, 119. See also the account of Y. L. in Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,* 303: "The forest we were in was at Lipiczanska [Lipiczańska] Puszcza. We stayed together as a family group. … There were fifty people in our families unit, including five children. We would get fod from peasants we knew." That testimony mentions an attacked by the Home Army in the summer of 1943, but it was a partisan, Duvid-Hershl Meykl of the Orlanski Brigade, who was captured, and not unarmed members of the family camp. The testimony also mentions retaliatory killings of the Belorussian village chieftain of Zaczepicze and five peasants who informed on the Jews to the Germans. According to another testimony, a large group of Jews led by Bielicer, based in forests near Zaczepicze about ten kilometres from Bielica, received extensive assistance from the surrounding population. See the testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no.301/555.

[601] Tsvi Novopolanski, "In the Ghettos and the Woods with Partisans," in Shtokfish, *Sefer Divenishok,* 136 ff.

[602] Testimony of Eliezer Pupko as cited in Grzegorz Berendt, "Cena życia—ekonomiczne uwarunkowania egzystencji Żydów po 'aryjskiej stronie'," in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i materiały,* vol. 4 (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, IFiS PAN, 2008): 119.

> In an instant I was in the truck with the SS soldiers, moving toward the next village. I sat there silently looking at the murderers—well-fed, jolly, rosy-cheeked, each armed with a machine gun, a pistol on his belt, and whip in hand. Suddenly the truck stopped and I was told to get down and sit by the driver to direct the way. I didn't know my way around the villages. But I knew I had better do something quickly or else I would arouse suspicion. I picked up the map by the driver's seat, found my bearings, and began to direct the driver. After a few wrong turns we arrived at the village.
>
> I went from house to house with the SS. They demanded horses and carts, butter, cream, eggs, lard, and other provisions. With my limited knowledge of the German language, I translated what I thought was being said. Every peasant who wasn't quick enough in obeying orders was lashed with a whip.
>
> I had never seen the Belorussian or Polish farmers so subdued and submissive, terrified of angering the Nazis, I didn't pity them a bit. These were the kind of villagers who continuously terrorized and robbed the Jews. Now it was their turn to see this side of the Germans, with whom they had been cooperating. …
>
> During the conversation at the table, one officer described the intense pleasure he got from beating people until they bled.[603]

The "cooperation" of ordinary people with the Germans and the villagers' terrorization of the Jews is by and large a myth. Yoran soon had occasion to turn to the very farmers he disparaged when he fled to the forest with his brother to join the partisans.

> We began to look for farmhouses near the woods. We knocked on the door of the first one and begged for food. We were given some bread and water. …
>
> Making our way between the trees we came upon a path … We chanced upon a small hut, well camouflaged, and a Jewish family hiding within. … They had escaped from one of the surrounding villages and, being very familiar with the area, subsisted by begging for food from kindly neighboring farmers. …
>
> We followed a path for about a mile and came upon a camp—some huts made of twigs, a couple of bonfires, potatoes baking, and several Jewish families trying to keep warn and dry by the flames. These were people from Kurzeniec and the vicinity. … At night those men who had some money went to the villagers they knew and bought food. Those who had no money simply begged or scrounged. …
>
> At a nearby village we stopped to beg for food, and a kind woman gave us some hot potato pancakes. …
>
> At the first hutor [i.e., an isolated farm, sometimes spelled *chutor*] we knocked on the door and asked for bread, which the farmer kindly gave us.[604]

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[603] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 78.

[604] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 88, 97, 99, 122.

Leon Kahn (then Leib Kaganowicz) describes the widespread help given to Jews by many Poles in the countryside around Ejszyszki, such as the residents of Lebiedniki. Later, he and his father would travel from Raduń to the small Polish village of Powiłańce which consisted of about forty houses. Almost every house offered them food: "Very soon our wagon was filled with butter and eggs and flour and fresh vegetables, and my father and I wept at their kindness…"[605] After leaving Raduń, they went from farm to farm asking for help. They were often given refuge for two or three days hiding in barns and stables. In some cases, fearing for the safety of their families, the peasants only agreed to provide food. "Most of the farmers from whom we begged food or shelter were kind to us," he recalled. In one case, overcome by terror at the news of the fate of a Jew caught by the Germans, a Polish farmer pleaded with Kahn to leave the hideout in his barn. The farmer's son fell to his knees to beg forgiveness for the fear that had paralyzed him. Kahn understood his benefactors' predicament and reluctantly moved on.[606]

A number of Poles helped Kahn and his father before they eventually joined up with a Jewish group in the forest. He mentions the Żołudzewicz family near Ejszyszki, who provided us with "every possible thing to help us in our forest life and gave us money to buy rifles"; a farmer by the name of Buczko on the edge of Nacza forest; and a kindly family of farmers on the outskirts of Linica, who bundled them into their house, fed them and dried their clothes, and sheltered them overnight. Another acquaintance of the family, named Rukowicz, gave them a warm welcome, but seemed somehow uneasy. "We were poised ready to flee when the reason for his uneasiness became evident: another Jewish family—Sholem Levo, his wife, two sons and a niece!" While Rukowicz invited the Kahns to share the Levo family's quarters (an unfinished wing of the house), the Levos were not too enthusiastic about the arrangement and asked Kahn's father to look for some other place to hide.[607] After establishing themselves in the forest, a food gathering group was "sent out … each evening to beg in the neighbouring villages where most of the people felt kindly toward us." In particular, the villagers of Powiłańce "helped us again most willingly for they sympathized with our plight."[608]

Numerous other Jewish testimonies confirm the widespread assistance provided to Jews both within and outside the ghettos created by the Germans. This help was often short term, however, because of the enormous risks involved and the fear of German retaliation. Hardly any of these Christians, however, have ever been recognized by Yad Vashem for their efforts.

> [Dr. Kac, a native of Łódź, narrowly escaped being killed by a Lithaunian execution squad near Nowa Wilejka in the summer of 1941.] The peasants told us that that the archbishop of Wilno [Romuald Jałbrzykowski] and, following him, various Catholic priests enjoined Catholics to extend

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[605] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 42–45, 51, 55.

[606] Ibid., 75, 77, 79, 83.

[607] Ibid., 81–84, 111–12, 114.

[608] Ibid., 124.

help and compassion to the Jews. Indeed peasants very often helped us without any remuneration. When we entered their huts they often refused to accept anything from us for the milk, bread and other food they offered to us. Besides this they expressed to us their sympathy and their indignation at all that had befallen the Jews. …

At dawn I noticed a peasant passing near by. I asked him to inform the local squire that a wounded person was asking for his help. [The landowner had previously been beaten by Lithuanian soldiers for bringing food to the Jewish prisoners where Dr. Kac was held.] To my great amazement and joy the landlord did arrive around midnight and took me by carriage to his house. He helped me dress my wound, fed me, washed me with his own hands and presented me with peasant's clothing and some money. I slept there for a few hours and just before daybreak I set out on my way in the direction he told me. That extraordinary person bid me farewell and at the last minute handed me a rosary and a scrap of paper with his farm hand's name.

… I wanted to leave the reach of the activities of the Lithuanian sentries, as I was advised to do by the Poles whose hospitality I had partaken of along the way. From the lips of peasants I heard about the mass murders perpetrated on Jews in an analogous fashion to the execution I had endured. … It is important to stress that I encountered exceptionally sincere warm-heartednesss from Catholic peasants and Polish landlords. I was comforted and helped with money, food, and a place to sleep. My wound was dressed in manor houses. …

The area I now entered had Polish police who tended to accommodate the Jews. In one of the Belorussian towns [i.e., in a Polish-speaking area incorporated in the so-called Ostland, formerly Soviet Belorussia], not far from the Lithuanian border, through the efforts of the mayor, priest and head of the Jewish Council, I was placed in the hospital and provided with papers [i.e., an identity document] and money for my further journey. [609]

Our only friend [at the hospital in Baranowicze where the author worked as a doctor] was genial, tall, blonde Dr Lukaszenia, director of the Town Council's Health Department. He went out of his way to help us. … His great heart was his undoing. The Germans subsequently shot him for helping Jews and partisans.

Another great blessing was to find an old friend again. Ludmila and I had known each other since early childhood; we grew up in the same street …

… Looking round I saw two young Poles I knew far too well. Before the war I had had many clashes with them on the sports field and they had been anti-Semites even then. Palecki and Wolosiewicz [Wołosiewicz] were inseparable … and had seemed to find Jew-baiting amusing. …

These days incredible things happened all the time and most of them bad, but to find myself, a short time later, sitting in a comfortable chair in Palecki's home and eating a generous ham sandwich and enjoying a cup of tea, was so pleasantly incredible I could hardly believe it …

'Things are pretty bad for you, aren't they? Well they're going to get worse. When we saw you walking by we thought we ought to warn you. There are rumours that the Einsatzgruppe is on its way to Baranovichi [Baranowicze], and they're probably more than rumours. The Germans have the peasants digging up the ground behind the railway.'

I knew it would have to come sometime.

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[609] Account of Dr. Kac in Żbikowski, *Archiwum Ringelbluma,* vol. 3, 471–74.

‘Any idea when?’

‘No. Can we do anything to help you?’

‘What do you need the most?’

They were surprising me all the time.

‘A pistol.’ I said.

Palecki gave a bark of a laugh.

‘We want one ourselves, every Pole wants one! They’re hellish difficult to come by. All I can say is that if we have any luck we won’t forget you.’

Anyone seeing us sitting talking together would have thought we were old friends; they showed no sign of their former animosity and seemed only to remember the games we had enjoyed against each other and not the resentment that frequently turned into violence. Walking home with a sausage concealed beneath my coat, I pondered the unpredictability of human behaviour.

A few days later I ran into a man I greatly admired. Mr Slivak [Śliwak] was a Pole and had been one of our teachers at high school. Always calm, imposing, well-dressed and well-mannered, he had made no distinction between his pupils. Now, although he knew it was dangerous for him to be seen having a conversation with a Jew, he stopped me and with genuine interest, asked how things were going. … I knew he genuinely wished to console me …

I had no option now but to attempt to make a break for it. When it was dark and the ghetto was quiet, I dug a hole under the wire with my bare hands and managed to ease myself through. I was dripping blood as I knocked softly at Olga [Berezin]’s door. That wonderful girl, careless of her own safety, gave me shelter yet again. But there was a limit to the danger to which I could expose her; a few days later I sneaked back again behind the wire of the ghetto. …

That day, when I had made my furtive return to the ghetto, I was confronted by the anger and reproof of a number of my co-habitants.

‘You have to stop this,’ they said.

‘You put us all at risk, and you know it. How can you? They won’t punish only you if you’re caught, they’ll punish us too. This is the last time, Leon; if you try it again we’ll have no choice but to denounce you. Don’t you know the ‘Collective Responsibility’ order? They were right of course. I had no choice. I gave them my word that I would not leave the ghetto again. …

[The author managed to leave the ghetto on one occasion because of a ruse concocted by Olga, a nurse at the hospital where he used to work, who convinced the Germans that he was needed to perform an operation.]

‘Oh God, how did you dare?’

Only last week a young couple had been shot and the bodies left dangling in the square as a warning to anyone else who might be contemplating the crime of helping a Jew. …

‘The Einsatzgruppe is in the town,’ she said. ‘They murdered all the Jews in Lachovichi [Lachowicze] yesterday. A peasant who saw it came into the hospital and he told me. He was nearly out of his mind. You know they’ve been digging ravines behind the town for months—now it’s Baranovichi’s turn and they’re going to begin to liquidate the ghetto today.’ Her arms tightened around me. …

She was a wonderful girl. She had thought of everything. She had persuaded her little friend Natasha, the telephonist, to tell anyone who might make enquiries about me to say that ‘Dr Berkowicz was assisting at an operation and could not be disturbed’. For herself, she had feigned illness and had been granted exemption from duty. …

‘No!’ I said, putting my finger to her lips. ‘No, please Olga, don’t make it any harder than it is. I have to go back to the ghetto and you must go back to work. Remember that there is only one thing you can do for me now. Don’t let me have you on my conscience.

A few hours later I stole away and by scrambling over fences and using private gardens and gates I reached the small side street where I joined the workers returning to the ghetto. When we neared the ghetto gates I saw Olga standing waiting to see us pass. We dared not smile at each other or raise a hand in farewell. A few months later she was shot by a German firing squad for giving help to the Jews. …

In the summer of 1942 my father was still allowed to work outside the ghetto. …

‘I think I know how you can join the partisans,’ he said. … ‘Today I met a [Belorussian] peasant named Pashka who used to work for me before the war. He asked after you. … He says he can take you to them. … Tomorrow morning he will wait for you with his horse and cart at the end of the street where Olga lives. You will have to leave when I do.’ …

I reached Olga’s house … There was no answer to my sharp rat-at-tat. … While I was hesitating a woman came to the door of the next house and I remembered that Olga had often spoken of ‘her friend’ next-door. I smiled at her.

‘You’ve only just missed her, she said with commiseration. … You look as though you could do with a cup of tea. Come and have one with me. I don’t mind you waiting here for a while.’ …

In the distance I could see a horse and cart with a man trotting beside it. … I was gradually lessening the distance between us when I saw a Pole I knew walking towards me. He already had seen me. He would know I had no right to be on the street alone. All he had to do was to call out ‘Jude!’ and I was lost. He stared at me as we passed each other … I had nearly reached Pashka. … I called his name as loudly as I dared and was overjoyed to see him stop walking and halt his horse.

‘You’re late,’ he said, as I came up to him. ‘Get on the cart and take that damn coat off.’ …

I looked back. The Pole was still watching me. … Fate was on my side … he did not betray me but just quietly walked away.

‘So you want to join the partisans?” Pashka said, shaking the reins, ‘well let’s hope you know what you’re doing.’

It was still only early morning on the first day of the rest of my life. I am happy to say that after the war the Pole and I met again and we talked of that day as we shared a friendly drink. I have never forgotten that I probably owed my life to him.

[Pashka kept Dr. Berkowicz hidden in his barn until he hooked up with the Soviet partisans in the winter.]

He [Pashka] turned and lifted a heavy finger at the children. ‘He isn’t here,’ he said. ‘Nobody’s here. Understand?’ …

The sudden opening of the door was a welcome diversion. Pashka’s wife eased her way into the barn and stood over me, offering a bowl of kasha, or porridge. …

‘I am very grateful to you …”

She made a dismissive gesture. She would not look at me. I felt truly sorry for her. She was frightened out of her mind, and who could blame her? Everybody knew the penalty for harbouring a Jew. Not that many people did so as the punishment was too prompt and savage. And yet here we were, on the main road, under the noses of police and Germans and she had young children. She

was forced to put a family of seven at risk for the sake of a young man she had never seen before. Her animosity towards me was wholly understandable. Her anguish and fear justifiable.[610]

… there is testimony about Belorussians who sent food and money to the ghetto [in Baranowicze]. [Dr. Zelig] Lewinbok tells of pious Catholics—Poles … who hid Jews without demanding payment. …

The decency of Eduard [Edward] Chacza, a Polish Catholic who worked in the municipal sanitation department and was responsible for the Catholic cemetery, stands out. …

Survivors' accounts focus on two prominent incidents. In the first Chacza saved a woman and a girl and later Shmuel (Mulia) Jankielewicz, the chairman of the second Judenrat; and the second in which he saved two women who at first were afraid he would hand them over to the Germans. In fact, Chacza saved many more Jews. Many testimonies recount that his house was open to fugitives and that he frequently hid them in the mortuary of the Catholic cemetery. He fed them and gave them time to recover their strength before helping them reach the forests. He is said to have had three or four non-Jewish colleagues who helped in his rescue work. In early 1943, he was able to save a group of thirty-five of the last Jewish workers in the SD camp.

After all the Jews had been murdered, Chacza served as an intelligence source for the partisans in the district and was arrested twice. The first time the Germans let him go. He was arrested again in November 1943—whether for his assistance to Jews or assistance to the partisans is not known. He was brutally tortured and incarcerated in a series of camps (we do not know which) until the liberation. Chacza alone saved between sixty and 150 persons.[611]

The mayor of the town at that time was a Polish man named Matorose. Some years earlier at the time of the Polish rule he was the head master of the elementary school in Kurenets [Kurzeniec]. Nyomka Shulman was then his favorite student. Nyomka approached him and asked him to get a job as an official delivery man and assistant to the mayor. Matorose gave Nyomka the keys to the storage areas where there was supply [sic] of salt, gasoline and other goods. Nachoom got a job as a janitor and they both got official papers showing they were allowed to be around the restricted areas. …

Farmers … started coming to town and Nyomka that had forged the signature of Matorose gave them bags of salt. In exchange we got rifles.[612]

Motoros [sic], the head of the town committee, was a Polish gentile that was very good to the Jews. He gave us permission on Rosh Hashanah to go to the synagogue. Prior to the Russian invasion he was the principal of the school. …

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[610] Berk, *Destined to Live,* 61–97. On his return to Baranowicze after the "liberation" of that town, the author was received warmly by a Polish schoolmate. Ibid., 219–21.

[611] Yehuda Bauer, "Jewish Baranowicze in the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 31 (2003): 123, 139–40.

[612] Account of Zalman Uri Gurevitz in Meyerowitz, ed. *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

On that day, Motoros, the head of the town committee, sent us a message warning us that we must not go to synagogue on the second day of the holiday because the police were planning to interrupt the prayers and cause havoc. …

We had no connection to the outside world: no newspaper or radio. We weren't allowed to talk to the Christians. There was a strict law forbidding Christians from getting in touch with any Jews. Once in a while, a Christian would come to us and whisper something, but we never knew if what they told us had any substance. …

We knew something was going to happen, and decided to go to our hiding place. We were once told by a Christian woman who cleaned the Polish school, that there was a huge basement under the school, and she suggested it as a good hiding place when trouble arose. She also told us that Nachum Alperovich and Nyomka Shulman had stayed there many times.

I took my children and hurried to the Christian woman's home. … After we stayed there for a short time, we had to leave. One of the policemen that knew us came by and although he was not outwardly hostile, the woman was very worried. The policeman told us to not concern ourselves needlessly, that the Gestapo came to Kurenitz [Kurzeniec] but they were just mugging the Jews not killing them. But from his expression I thought it better not to go back home. … A Christian villager from Lipnivitz … On his return he took us in his sled and all the time hurried his horse. … we reached Ratzka, a little village nearby safely. We stayed there for a short time and then returned. …

One day a Christian woman came to [my two sisters] and said that she had heard from official sources that two weeks before Passover of 1942 they were going to slaughter the Jews of Kurenitz. She suggested running away.[613]

Without hesitation they immediately went to Mataroz [sic], the Polish teacher, to ask for his help. … Rohaleh and Doba [the author's mother and sister] spoke to Mataroz, who liked me very much from when I was a student and who was now the mayor of the town [of Kurzeniec] appointed by the Germans, and they told him about my imprisonment. As son as they left Mataroz, they were taken away by the police, as were my mother and Rashkaleh, and it was Mataroz who decided to save us all from our death. Two days later I went to Mataroz to thank him for what he had done. …

I asked him to take our cow, since our lives seemed pretty much over, with or without a cow. He answered that he agreed to take the cow, since we had so much trouble even trying to take it to the meadow, but he had one condition. He would accept it if we would take half of the milk from the cow each time he milked it. I said to him that this could cause him great troubles as the mayor of a town, sending milk to a Jewish family. … Secretly, in all sorts of ways, he was able to transfer milk to us. …

Once again, I visited Mataroz. Mataroz, in his true nature, was liberal. As far as the Jews, he tried to help; this was not unknown by the Belarussian [sic] population, and they greatly disliked him. …

I came to Mataroz after he asked me to come to him. He immediately told me that murder was facing me everywhere I went and that he would try to help me. Further, he said, "You must know that between wishes and ability there is a big distance. I truly wish that all my students will survive, but what can I really do? As far as you are concerned, I suggest you come to the school as a laborer

[613] Account of Yitzhak Zimerman in Meyerowitz, ed. *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

doing cleaning and cutting wood for the fire, as well as operating the furnaces." At that point he was no longer head of the school, but since he was mayor he was able to do it. He was also in cahoots with one of the teachers. … I later found out that the person he was in touch with was the wife of Skrentani, who was a teacher in the school. [Mr. Skrentani, a Pole, had been the author's mathematics teacher and maintained friendly relations with the author's parents. *M.P.*] Skrentani himself worked for Mataroz in the municipal building, as head of the food distribution department. …

In the school worked a Polish woman who explained my duties to me. She was generally kind to me but she was very fearful … She begged me to be very careful and to make sure that no one would suspect that she was hiding a Jew at the school. Every time she had a hint of danger, she would quickly tell me to go hide in the basement. … About six months later, in the summer of 1942, the Germans killed Mataroz and his family.[614]

Hunger convinced us to try our luck at another house. This time an older woman opened the door. She brought out a large loaf of black bread weighing about three kilos. She cut off a third for herself and gave us the rest. …

Iche [Fiedler, a Jew from Kurzeniec] opened the large canvas bag he had with him to show us what he had collected that night. There were about eight or nine pieces of bread weighing more or less a kilo each, a bottle of milk, and a few pieces of hard cheese. He usually walked all night, he said, going through several villages, knocking on doors and asking for food. Once in a while he would get lucky and be given a piece of butter or some cereals and beans for a soup. It was quite rare to get a piece of meat. Not every house he stopped at had enough food to give any away and others didn't feel like giving. Usually, though, such a night of collecting would bring in enough food to last a family several days. Then the process was repeated, this time selecting different villages in order not to overburden the same households too often.

Close to 200 people lived in the forest, he said, and they all gathered food the same way. On any given night, it was not unusual to find thirty to forty men and women in small groups of two or three busily collecting food in villages inside the forest and up to ten kilometers from it. Since the enterprise was spontaneous and uncoordinated, some villages or individual houses were approached too often and this unquestionably caused resentment among the villagers.[615]

[After escaping from the German camp in Świerżeń Nowy near Stołpce]: At the other end of the forest, we saw a small, lit shack in a clearing, a kind of cottage. When we walked in, two Polish orphans came up to us—a little brother and sister, who were left without their parents. … They took us down to the empty potato cellar, and we hid there. Once a week, on Sunday night, I left the hiding place. Some peasants I met, Poles, gave me potatoes and bread, so I went there. I brought this food back to my wife and daughter, and this kept us alive. …

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[614] Nachum Alperovich, "Thus It Began: Chapters from the Underground," in Meyerowitz, ed. *The Scroll of Kurzeniac,* 321 ff.

[615] Charles Gelman, *Do Not Go Gentle: A Memoir of Jewish Resistance in Poland, 1941–1945* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1989), 90–91.

After we were in the cellar for two months, the Polish orphans told us they were scared to let us stay any longer. We headed for the fields right away and hid in a peasant's hayloft. He never found out we were there. … I later found a small group of Jewish partisans in the woods. I wanted them to take us, but they couldn't because their unit commander, a Jew from Słuck named Epshteyn, warned them that any strangers they harbored would be shot. We found out later that this Soviet-Jewish unit commander gave this order because there was fear German spies were infiltrating the partisans. …

While we were hiding out in the woods, I met two Polish peasants. One of them was from Polesnya—he was called Adam Trus. I didn't know them before the war, had never even seen them. The peasants helped us a lot—they brought us food, water, and other things. …

My wife and I, along with other Jews, returned to our hometown, Stołpce. The town was burned to the ground, and only a handful of Jews survived. We met only one cousin of mine there—Ezriel Tunik and his daughter—and the three Kaplan sisters. They were three little girls who were hidden in a Polish woman's home for two years.[616]

[Abraham Viner from Naliboki, who was taken by the Germans to a work camp in Dworzec, recounts his experiences]: People were supposed to come to save us. There was a lot of talk about this, but nothing happened. In December 1942, our Polish Catholic supervisor warned us that there was going to be a liquidation of the camp. He advised us to run away on our way to work. There were a few hundred people at the camp. When the guards realized that we were escaping, they started shooting. We scattered in different directions, both men and women. Probably more than a hundred succeeded in escaping.[617]

In the middle of the night a peasant who was a good acquaintance of mine, stole through the board of the fence which surrounded the market [in Ejszyszki] and told me, Aitka Kanichovsky and Shoshanna Yuraknesky: "If you want to live escape immediately before the light of day." We decided to escape. My two sons and myself … along with Aitka and her two sons, Shoshanna and her son and another girl, moved a board in the fence, escaped through the opening and were on our way: The police guards were far away from us.

The good peasant led us to the village of Duchishok [Dowgieliszki] to the house of another peasant who was also a good acquaintance of ours. He fed us and we sent him to Aishishok [Ejszyszki] to find out what was happening there. He returned and told us that there were no more Jews in the village. I decided to go to Benyakoni [Bieniakonie] since the peasant was afraid to keep us in his house. There I found my two sons. …

When the Germans ordered all Jews in the vicinity to assemble at Vorovna [Werenowo], to the ghetto about to be set up, I decided not to go. … Despite my family's objections I decided to disguise myself as a peasant, return to the Aishishok vicinity and find refuge at one of our peasant

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[616] Account of Y.G. in Trunk, *Jewish Responses to Nazi Persecution,* 209–11. Yad Vashem recognized Jan Starzyk and his mother Elżbieta Starzyk for their rescue of six Jews whom they sheltered in their home after the liquidation of the local ghetto in September 1942: Azriel Tunik, Nechama Filszick and her 8-year-old daughter Chana, and the three Kaplan sisters: Ester, Dvora, and Zahava. See Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 748.

[617] Tec, *Resilience and Courage,* 285–86.

acquaintances with who we had ties of friendship and business for years … I reached the Aishishok vicinity and in a field there, I met a goy who was a good acquaintance of ours. I told him of my intention. He too advised me against entering the ghetto. He told me to fetch my sons while he would think of some plan and place to hide us.

I returned to Benyakoni and succeeded in transferring my children disguised as peasants. This peasant was a "sultis" ["sołtys" or village reeve] and on authority of his servant, the Germans and Lithuanians came and went freely in his house. His house therefore was not a possible refuge for us. A few days later [he] came and told us that the "Bagmina" ["gmina"] (the village committee) suspected him of hiding Jews. He was very sorry but he could accommodate us no longer, his life was in danger! According to the "law" a peasant caught hiding Jews was sentenced to death.

It was the beginning of November [1941]. The earth was already frozen and snow had already begun falling … Where should we go? I remembered that we had some acquaintances in the village of Yurtzishky [Juraciszki]. I begged the peasant to lead us to this village and point out to us, from a distance, the house of my peasant friend. … He agreed. On sabbath morning we left and made our way through forests and fields until we reached the outskirts of the village. From there the peasant pointed out the house we were looking for. I knocked on the door and the peasant came out. When he saw me he shouted in amazement: "Good God! They told me you too were killed!" He took us in his house, fed us and hid us in his pantry for a few days. But since his house stood on the road he suggested transferring us to his sister who lived in an isolated house in a big forest far from the highway.

We accepted his generous suggestion gladly and thankfully. At night we set out for his sister's house, located about two kilometers away from the village … She welcomed us warmly. She was a wise and good-hearted woman but poor. The monetary question did not disturb me. Before the war we had hidden a large amount of merchandise from our store in the homes of many peasants. Many debts owed to us were also outstanding.

In exchange for the merchandise, paid for by honest peasants, I was able to obtain enough food and also pay the peasant woman for our food expenses. To my request that we be allowed to spend at least two weeks in her house, the woman responded: "You can stay as long as you like, the war will not end so soon …"

We stayed for six months at her house. During the day we all remained in one room, and hardly emerged.[618]

One day, a Christian by the name of Makarevich arrived at my workplace in Szczuczyn. He lived seven kilometers from Vasilishok in a hamlet. He had a second letter from Moishele, [saying] that we should run away from the ghetto as soon as possible because we would soon be liquidated.

I quickly ran to my group. We discussed whether or not to run away. I decided to postpone my running away for a few months. The peasant women departed with that decision and told us that in a few weeks, she would come to take us. On the way, she was stopped by a German patrol that made her return to Szczuczyn because, at night, civilians were forbidden to travel. The Christian woman remained overnight in Szczuczyn. The following morning, she again appeared at my place of work, outside the ghetto and pleaded with me that we should ride off with her.

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[618] Account of Rachel Potchter, Alufi and Barkeli, *"Aishishuk"; Its History and Its Destruction,* 70–71.

At that moment, the decision was made to run off to the forest. I quickly left my workplace, ran to my wife and child, quickly pack a few old garments in a bag and the essentials for our child. My mind was working feverishly. The plan was ready. I took my wife and child in the direction of the bath house that was outside the ghetto. Chayele Kravitz worked there as did Dr. Katz' father as those responsible for the bath house. They helped us in our escape. There, in the courtyard, the Christian woman was already waiting with a wagon. My wife quickly dressed like a peasant woman, took our child in her arms and sat down on the wagon. I followed with a container of paint and a paintbrush; the alibi in case we were stopped was I was on my way to work.

On the outskirts of the city, I tore off the yellow patches, put on peasant apparel, took the reigns from the Christian woman, and became the driver. It was our good fortune that it started to rain and snow. This made our travelling easier. I don't know how many hours I drove on with the wagon. More than once out of fear, my heart stood still. One thing I know. Because of that action, we remained alive.

We arrived safely at our appointed destination at the home of the Christian woman, Makerevich [Makarewicz], and remained there for several days. In a few days, Moishele and Arke Gordon came as well as another few partisans. They took us to the "Nacher Pushckes" [Nacza forest] where we joined the partisan groups.[619]

I felt shooting behind me. I felt that I was wounded in my leg but continued to run. I ran and fell. I ran [from Wasiliszki] in the direction of the Aratish [Arcisze] Forest. I could hear a motorcycle chasing me. I was being shot at. With my last bit of strength, I reached the forest.

The Christian woman, Filanovich, from Ostrowiec let me into her house and gave me first aid. She contacted Dr. Alpert's wife, Chaya, and got a few bandages and some medication for me.

The Christian woman hid me in a pit in the forest; and my leg healed. When I regained my strength, I thanked the woman who had saved me and made my way further into the forest. Very soon, I met up with the partisans.[620]

In the night, we slipped away from our hideout [in Raduń], and reached a factory building. We stopped to rest a little, and a farmer passed by who took pity on us, and invited us to hide in the yard of his house. He even brought us bread and milk. From here we began to wander. We were warned not to try and return to Vilna [Wilno]. Again, we were fortunate with a farmer …, who dug a pit behind his house and "settled" us in it. Even though he did not have many means, his wife and daughter cared for us and fed us, and when the snows came and covered the pit, the daughter walked through the snow in order to offer us assistance. … The farmer's family, whose name was Adamovitz [Adamowicz], lived very frugally, yet it shared with us whatever it had.[621]

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[619] Account of Eliahu Volochinsky in Losh, *Sefer zikaron le-kehilot Shtutshin Vasilishki Ostrina Novi Dvor Rozhanka,* 249 [335].

[620] Account of Leibke Einstein in Losh, *Sefer zikaron le-kehilot Shtutshin Vasilishki Ostrina Novi Dvor Rozhanka,* 251 [337].

[621] Account of Faygel Gerber in Moorstein, *Zelva Memorial Book,* 80–81.

In the summer of 1942, during the final liquidation of the Radun [Raduń] ghetto near Vilna [Wilno], a handful of Jews managed to escape. Out of the original group of 13, all but a few perished at the hands of their pursuers. The survivors—Feige Garber, Fegel Yurkansky, and Esther Fischer, the rabbi's wife, and their children, five-year-old Iser and seven-year-old Itke—were making their way toward Vilna, fatigued and spent, when they encountered a Pole who warned them of the danger ahead. He led them to a section of forest that belonged to the Adamowicz family, where they spent the night, despairing, hungry, and at a loss as to how to proceed. The next morning, the Adamowiczes—husband Jan, wife Maria, and Eugenia—approached the Jewish refugees, calmed them, and promised to save them. The Adamowiczes were poor peasants who had a small farm in the village of Polstak [Półstoki]. Together they dug a bunker in the forest, where the Jewish refugees spent the next two years until the liberation. The Adamowiczes met all their needs during this time and their children [Józef, Stanisława, Janina, Antonina, and Eugenia] were full partners in the rescue operation. The Adamowiczes sought no remuneration; they considered their acts a self-evident human imperative.[622]

The Grodno group was intending to return to the Nacza Forest [in the vicinity of Raduń], with its many Russian partisans and Jewish units. This forest bordered on the Russka [Ruska] Forest …

The farmers in the villages of the area openly showed their support for the partisans and extended to them all the help they could. They even helped Jews who had escaped the massacres, hiding the survivors in their homes.[623]

[After escaping from the ghetto in Lida, Jashke Mazowi] roamed the countryside. …

"I saw a hutor. I knocked at the door, trying to decide what language to use, Russian or Polish. … A man opened the door. I spoke Polish and told him I was a Jew and that I ran away from the ghetto. What should I do? He obviously knew Polish and looked at me, then turned around. I thought that this will be the end. … He moved to a cupboard, took out vodka, gave me half a glass, a cutlet, and said, 'Here, eat and drink.' This was the first vodka I ever had."

He spoke, "You are young. … Move around. Don't go to the ghetto and you will survive, you have a chance."

"Where should I go?"

"I will tell you which hutor to go to. They will give you food. Make yourself a place in the forest, a bunker … at night people will give you food and you will live."

"He gave me courage, food for the road, and I left. During the day I stayed in a small forest. The day seemed to last forever. How will I make it? At night I went into the hutor he told me to go ro. They gave me food. The next day it was easier. It did not seem so long. The day after even easier. …

"This was how it was, a week or two, I don't remember. … Still I was afraid. It was cold. I knew already where to go. I had special places where they would give me food.

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[622] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part One, 55.

[623] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 147–48.

"Once on a very dark night I walked and walked. I lost the way. The hutors and all. I saw only unknown places. In the dark I came upon a small poor-looking hut. The man gave me cold potatoes, no doubt the only thing he had …"

When Mazowi told his hosts he wanted to meet the Russians the son agreed to take him there in his horse-drawn wagon.[624]

Some peasants spotted us [escaping from the German camp]; we must have looked suspicious, with our ragged clothes and starved, pale faces. But they said nothing. We got safely through the open field, reached the road, and finally, after what seemed an eternity, entered the forest … We walked quickly through the snow-covered fields, skirted the town and its suburbs and made our way towards the village of Litovka [Litówka], about four kilometres from Novogrodek [Nowogródek]. … We reached the house of the Hicles (dogcatchers) [this was the Bobrowski family;[625] *hycel* is slang for an animal control officer] at the end of the suburb of Peresika [Peresieka], on the way to Litovka. … The Hicles were Polish Gentiles … They lived in an isolated house, far from the town, which no one ever visited. But it was the Hicles who felt compassion for the Jews' bitter fate and helped as much as they could, smuggling food into the ghetto. … Every Jew who managed to escape from the ghetto and reach the Hicles was hidden for a day or two and supplied with food for the journey. The Hicles kept in touch with the Bielski partisans, and they would tell runaway Jews where they might be found. When the Germans later found out about the activities of the Hicles, they killed them and burned their property.

After resting for about an hour in the Hicles' house, we went on through the fields to Boinski's farm. Boinski [Boiński] was a rich Polish farmer who raised and sold pigs. He had many friends among the Jews of Novogrodek, and he helped many Jews during the Holocaust. At midnight we knocked on Boinski's door. He came out, frightened, and told us that he lived in constant fear of the Germans, who paid him frequent visits. He agreed to hide us for one day. He led us into the barn and covered us with hay. At noon, the good man brought us some bread, potatoes and water, and

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[624] Tec, *Defiance,* 68–69.

[625] According to the Yad Vashem Institute: "Dozens of Jews who lived in the district capital of Nowogrodek [Nowogródek] owed their lives to the five members of the Bobrowski family, who saved Jewish refugees without expecting anything in return. Franciszek Bobrowski and his family were simple, uneducated folk who lived in a small cottage on the outskirts of Nowogrodek. The Bobrowskis, who were poor, hunted stray dogs and skinned them for a living. Guided by humanitarian considerations, they opened their door to Jewish fugitives from the Nowogrodek ghetto, fed them, and allowed them to rest for a while. In the dead of the night, the Bobrowskis took the fugitives to the nearby forest, where they joined the partisan unit run by the Bielski brothers. The Bobrowskis, known as dog hunters, became a household name among Jews escaping from the ghetto, who knew that they could count on them to find them a safe shelter. At the start of the summer of 1944, several weeks before the area was liberated, informers denounced the Bobrowskis to the authorities, who raided their home and killed the Jewish family that was staying there. Afterwards, the Germans burned down the Bobrowskis' cottage and pushed Franciszek and his wife, Franciszka, into the flames. Their sons, Stefan and Michal [Michał], were arrested and executed, while their daughter, Maria, was sent to a concentration camp in Germany, which she survived." See Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 98–99. According to a Jewish witness, Shiffra Harkavi and her two young daughters, Ruthie and Hadaske, were being sheltered by the Bobrowski family when the tragedy struck. Hadaske, who was around three years of age at the time, as well as a young Christian child miraculously survived. The young girls were placed in a Christian orphanage in Nowogródek. Hadaske, who was registered as Halinka Bobrowska, survived the war, even though her Jewish identity was widely known. She was adopted by a Jewish couple after the war. See Frances "Fruma" Gulkowich Berger and Murray "Motke" Berger, *With Courage Shall We Fight: The Memoirs and Poetry of Holocaust Resistance Fighters* (Margate, New Jersey: ComteQ Publishing, 2010).

when night fell we left the farm and made our way to the nearby road. Twelve kilometres down the road, and several hundred metres away from it, we reached the home of a Belorussian farmer named Kostik [Konstantin] Kozlovsky, who used to bring messages and letters from the Bielski partisans to the ghetto Jews. We arrived at dawn exhausted. Koslovsky said that no partisans had been there for several days, but that they might very well come that night. He suggested that we should wait for them in a nearby grove. We spent the whole day in that grove, lying in a trench from which we could watch the road, bustling with German military vehicles. At nightfall, several young Jews from Bielski's partisans arrived at Kozlovsky's farm.[626]

Franek [Franciszek Bobrowski], the dogcatcher, was a brave man who hid Jewish people. He was found out and shot, together with some of them, shortly after. …

Boyinski [Boiński] fed us and put us on the big Russian *komin*—a stove in the front with enough space in the back for two or three people. The first day, the farmer, his wife and children were hospitable. The second day everybody was uneasy and Boyinski was afraid someone had spotted us and would send the Germans. On the third day he urged us to leave, describing which roads to take and which peasants could be trusted. …

He brought me to the farm of a former priest by the name of [Piotr] Kolenda, I think. There we found Ania Alter's cousins, uncle and aunt, and Aliosha's brother, Rubin, who was visiting. …

At night we would move somewhere else. Sometimes the boys would decide to stay two days. They knew all the farmers … From the farms I was able to write Papa, Mama and Rita [in Nowogródek].[627]

[Tuvia Bielski and his family received extensive help from Christians in the vicinity of Stankiewicze, his native village near Wsielub, north of Nowogródek]:

From gentile contacts he obtained false papers, one identifying him as a Belorussian, another as a former Polish Army officer named Andzoi [Andrzej]. …

… he moved from place to place, relying on a constellation of gentile acquaintances he had known from his years of living in Subotnik [Sobotniki], Lida and Stankevich [Stankiewicze]. …

… Asael and Zus [Bielski] … searched for safe homes for the Dziencielski relatives … There was no problem finding spots for the aged members. It was tougher locating a place for a baby, whose cries would easily attract the neighbors' attention. The brothers were turned down a few times before finding a Polish couple receptive to the idea. …

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[626] Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 57–59. Konstantin (Kostik) Kozlovsky's younger brother, who used his position as a policeman in Nowogródek to assist in escape attempts and to deliver weapons and intelligence to the Bielski brothers, was also captured by the Germans, shot and his body burned. See Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 131. Konstantin (Kostik) Kozlovsky and his sons, Genadi and Vladimir, were recognized by Yad Vashem in 1993.

[627] Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 104–106. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, Piotr Kolenda was a landowner from Nowogródek who knew both both the Bielski and Dzienciolski families before the war. During the German occupation he helped hide the women before they could safely go to the forest and continued to assist members of the Bielski group while they were in the forest. See "The Bielski Partisans—Photography," Internet: <http://www.ushmm.org>. Piotr Kolenda was recognized by Yad Vashem in 2013.

… [Tuvia] visited a wealthy Pole he was acquainted with, named Wilmont, who welcomed the couple into his home and agreed to shelter them. Sonia took on a position as his household seamstress … He gave Tuvia a pistol, a Belgian Browning, and four bullets. …

… Things weren't helped when a selfless Polish farmer named Kot, a man who was housing a few Bielski relatives, looked out his window one morning and noticed a group of local [Belorussian] police surrounding his house. …

During a search of the house, the officers discovered the Jewish fugitives—including the elderly Dziencielski parents—whom Kot quickly identified as his relatives. …

Claiming ignorance, Mr. Kot was arrested and taken to the local police station. Viciously beaten and tortured, he died from his injuries.[628]

When Tuvia [Bielski] and his people came close to the river Niemen [after leaving Naliboki forest], a farmer warned them that the German police were on the way. …

After the crossing, two families, the Dworeckis and the Taubs, told Tuvia that they would like to remain in the area, in the homes of Christian friends. The Dworecki sisters [Cila and Luba] explained that "We were in a terrible condition. We had wounds, lice, we were filthy, exhausted. My father felt that maybe we should stay a while with my father's Polish friend, G. Filipowicz. … We indeed went to the Pole. We were there for the winter. They helped us build a ziemlanka in a nearby forest. … We went back to Bielski."

A part of Chaja's [Bielski] family, including her old parents, also made arrangements to stay in the home of Christian friends.[629]

A small contingent of the [Bielski] unit's higher echelon (about twelve people in all) instead sought shelter in two peasant homes near Chrapinyevo [Chrapieniewo], occupied by elderly Poles. It turned out to be a tragic mistake.

… In the early afternoon of January 5, 1943, a troop of local [Belorussian] police and Germans … marched to the houses. … The enemy soldiers lobbed a grenade through a window … and opened fire on everyone who tried to escape. Everyone in the house was killed. …

At least nine Jews were killed in the tragedy near Chrapinyevo … Three Poles who owned the houses, and who risked so much to harbor the Bielskis, were also killed.[630]

During the first big Aktion in Nowogródek, December 1941, Luba [Rudnicki] lost her parents and all her siblings. … Around that time a Pole, Jarmałowicz [Jarmołowicz], came to her saying that he would like to rescue her and her husband. The man explained that Luba's father, before he was murdered, made him promise to save Luba and her husband. … the man had a reputation as an anti-Semite. Suspicious of the man's motives, numbed by the loss of her family, disinterested in life, she

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[628] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 37, 41, 52, 61, 64. Lola Kline, the infant daughter of Abraham Dzienciolski and Taube Bielski, was sheltered by a Polish couple and returned to her parents, who were part of the Bielski forest group, after the war. See Clare Marie Celano," A Story of Courage, Hope," *Examiner* (New Jersey), December 24, 2008.

[629] Tec, *Defiance,* 124.

[630] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 116–18.

refused the offer. [In fact, Jan Jarmołowicz and his wife Józefa rescued a group of Jews on their farm.[631] See the account that follows.]

The proposition was followed by one from Mrs. Sargowicki, a Polish woman and Luba's friend. The woman was ready to save Luba and her husband. …

Luba again refused. … after the second big Aktion in Nowogródek, August 7, 1942. Mrs. Sargowicki was still there, willing to aid. Her husband was a prisoner of war in Germany … This time the plan included Luba's brother-in-law [Meir Rudnicki] and two more ghetto inmates, Dr. Tamara Zyskind and her lover Dr. [Mark] Berkman. …

Luba and her companions were now to stay with Mrs. Sargowicki's niece, Zosia, next to the village of Chrapiniewo [Chrapieniewo] and near the small town of Iwje [Iwie]. … When they came to Zosia's farm they moved into the barn … Zosia decided that her charges should spend their days in the forest and return to the barn only at night. …

One day, Luba and her friends woke up to shooting sounds. From their Russian contacts they heard that the Germans had attacked the Bielski group. These men did not know how many had died, only that Zosia's mother was among those killed and that her farm had been burned down. The Bielski brothers had stayed at her farm.

Immediately after Zosia disappeared and was never heard from again. [The survivors of this group joined the Bielski group after a treacherous attack by Russian partisans, who murdered Dr. Berkman and Meir Rudnicki.][632]

[Esia Lewin of Nowogródek]: Though I no longer worked for the Foltanskis [Foltański, a Polish couple], they had kindly asked me to keep in touch, so I occasionally went to visit. However, one day, Mrs. Foltanski came to see me at the ghetto.

This was unusual. Non-Jews never came because it was not safe. She was not allowed to come to our house, or even through the gate … We had to talk through the slats in the fence.

She anxiously whispered that she wished to help us. She had heard of a group of Russian fighters called partisans … Did I want to join them?

What should I do with this news? My father was with me … I could not think of leaving him and did not know how I would escape, so I tanked Mrs. Foltanski for her trouble but remained in the ghetto. …

When I discovered that there were Jewish partisans, I immediately wanted to join them. I knew that my Bielski cousins were hiding in the woods, but I did not know yet that they were the ones who had started the group of Jewish partisans. …

One day when I was working in the army barracks, I learned that there was to be a German *actia,* or action. I knew what that meant: Jews would be rounded up random, taken away, and killed. Badly frightened, I ran to the Foltanskis for help and entered their parlor with tears streaming down my face. …

Mrs. Foltanski came with an armload of clothes to wear so I would not be recognized as a Jew. I removed my raggedy dress and shapeless jacket bearing the Star of David and slipped on Mrs.

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[631] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 302–3.

[632] Tec, *Defiance,* 57–61.

Foltanski's clothes, a bright blouse and skirt with a blue blazer. When I was dressed, they looked at me, satisfied, and proclaimed, "With thes clothers and your light hair, you don't look Jewish."

… Mrs. Foltanski came with me part way, leading me to a nearby cornfield to hide until she could come to find me the following day. I realize now how brave she was to do this. …

Around noon, I heard Mrs. Foltanski calling softly in Polish, "Esia, where are you?" I responded just as softly, "Here I am," and cautiously stood up so she could see me. Our eyes locked. She threw me a white cloth-covered package of food. Nothing more was said, but I knew that she was wishing me luck. She left as quickly as she had come and I never saw her again.

I was ravenous, so I immediately sat to wolf down the salami she had prepared. It was such a treat! I had not had food like this in a long time. …

… I hid for two days, but finally on the third day, I could last no longer. I needed someone who would help me.

Weak from exposure, hunger, and thirst, I stood up. To my amazement, there, just a few feet in front of me, although I had not heard her, was a sturdy young woman methodically cutting corn with a scythe. A second later, my amazement turned to astonishment when I recognized her as the kind teacher who had taught me how to knit and sew in third grade! I called out, "*Dzien [Dzień] dobry, Pani Fiedrowiczowa!*" ("Good morning, Mrs. Fiedrowiczowa!") She returned my greeting in surprise. How strange it must have been for her to see a young Jewish girl she knew from her class rising up from the corn!

Even before slaking my thirst, I wanted to know about the *actia.* … She scooped water from the pail at her feet and quickly offered the metal cup. …

Saying she wished she could help me more, she then invited me to share her lunch. It must have been difficult for this teacher, who had so often assisted me in class, to be unable to aid me now, when my need was so desperate.

I told her that I wanted to contact my former next-door neighbor, whose son used to play with my brother Aron and so perhaps would be willing to help me. Mrs. Fiedrowichova [sic] agreed it was worth trying, but advised me to wait until evening. …

I waited as long as I could. Late in the afternoon, when the light was dim, I stealthily arrived at my neighbor's house near my old home, where I had not been for such a long time. I knew her to be a welcoming person, but now even decent people were afraid to help Jews. Filthy with mud, I requested soap and water. She invited me in, but brought the soap and water to me at the door, mumbling with embarrassment, "Please leave as soon as possible." I could see that she, too, was petrified. She did not want to be caught helping a Je, for punishment would be certain, and even death was a possibility.[633]

On a cold wintry day on February 18, 1943 my brother Paul and I with the help of my father and my brother Osher—managed to escape from the [labor] camp [in Nowogródek]. We made our way to a friendly polish [sic] farmer in the village of "Kuscino" [Kuścin] where we were hidden in an underground bunker. What we hoped would be a short stay in the underground bunker lasted 18 long months. Just like Ann Frank, whose diary many of you have read, we faced the possibility of being discovered. We had many close calls, but because of the underground bunker we managed to

[633] Shor and Zakin, *Essie,* 31–36.

avoid detection. … At the end 8 of us, 7 men and 1 woman survived. We were liberated by the Russian army in July 1944.

The name of the farmer was Jan Jarmolowicz [Jarmołowicz], his wife Josefa [Józefa] Jarmolowicz and their lifelong maid Magdalena Cimoszko. Righteous gentiles who's [sic] names are now enshrined at *"Yad Vashem" in Jerusalem*.[634]

In July 1942 the Germans brought the Jews of Karelicze to the Novogrudok [Nowogródek] ghetto. Most of them were killed there in August 1942. Only a few escaped, among them Shlomo Stoler and his brothers. For months they were roaming the villages around their town. He knew the area, and the peasants knew him and took pity on him. They let him sleep in the granaries, and in the morning they gave him a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk and sent him on his way. So he roamed until winter. Almost no Jews were left in the area, and the peasants were afraid of the Germans or did not want to hide a Jew. Then he found out about the Bielski units. But unfortunately the Bielski camp was divided into many groups, and these groups were hiding in different places. It was difficult to find them. When an acquaintance brought him together with his cousin to the Yankelevich group, Yankelevitch rejected him. …

Shlomo Stoler was accepted by the Abramovich group, where he had an uncle.[635]

Julian and Joanna Rostkowski, who were known as upright people, lived in the village of Chutory [Hutory] Delatyckie, near Nowogrodek [Nowogródek], and were friendly with Luba Mejerson, a Jewish pharmacist from nearby Nowogrodek. Mejerson and her husband decided to escape to the forests and join the partisans. Not knowing what to do with Fruma, their six-year-old daughter, Luba asked Julian rostkowski, her friend, to hide her daughter. In early 1942, Rostkowski traveled to Nowogrodek with his 13-year-old daughter, Michalina, smuggled little Fruma out of the ghetto, and brought her home to his farm. Rostkowski introduced the little girl to their neighbors and the village mayor as an orphaned relative and Joanna, his wife, looked after her as if she were her own daughter. Her parents, who were hiding in the Naliboki forest with the Bielski brothers' partisan camp, used to visit the Rostkowski home occasionally to see how well their daughter was being cared for. In an operation launched by the Germans against partisans in the surrounding forests, the Rostkowskis' farm was burned down and they became destitute. For two and a half years, the Rostkowskis were reduced to working for local farmers, but despite the change in their fortunes they took little Fruma with them and looked after her. After the liberation in July 1944, Frumas's parents found her safe and sound with the Rostkowskis and took her back with them.[636]

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[634] Lubow, *Escape,* ix. See also Chapters 7–13. The author describes how parties of German soldiers visited farms with bloodhounds to sniff out hidden Jews and partisans. Ibid., 58.

[635] Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 249–50. According to another source, Shlomo Stoler was made a group leader by Bielski. "They went to the area around Korelitz [Korrlicze], into the villages … 'Bring back a lot of food; grain, meat, etc.' The partisans who went with him were amazed how capable and proud he was." See Ben-Ir, "On the Brink of Destruction," in Walzer-Fass, *Korelits,* 212 ff.

[636] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 677.

Gershon and Gita Berkowski had a grocery store in Wsielub (Nowogrodek [Nowogródek] district). Most of their customers were farmers from nearby villages, including the Lawskis [Ławski] of the neighboring village of Slowcza [Słowcza]. The two families had been friendly for many years … In 1941, shortly after the Germans occupied the region, they began to move Jews from locations in the vicinity to the Nowogrodek ghetto. To accomplish this, they mobilized local peasants and ordered them to round up Jews from the villages and transport them in their carts to Nowogrodek. Jan, the Lawskis' youngest son, was one of these [forced] recruits. He took advantage of his position to place Gita Berkowska, her daughter, Sonia, and her cousin Roiza Berkowska in his cart and conveyed them to a hideout in the forest nearby. Jan and his parents [Aleksander and Helena] protected the Jewish refugees and kept them fed and clothed. When winter approached, the Lawskis moved their wards to their farm, where they concealed them first in a cowshed and later in the granary. The Lawskis continued to protect Gita, Sonia, and Roiza until December 1942 … In December 1942, the three Jewish refugees were transferred to a family camp of Jewish partisans in the nearby forests; in the summer of 1944 they were liberated.[637]

Before the war, Irena Zadarnowska, an artist, and her husband, Stefan, lived in Zoludek [Żołudek], about 50 kilometers from Lida. When the Russians invaded the area, Irena and her husband fled to Vilna [Wilno], where Irena found employment as a scenery painter, for a traveling theater company called Estrada. There, Irena met Miriam (Masha) Pereworska who worked as a prompter for the company. Miriam had been born into an affluent family and was married with one daughter, Lilly (b. 1933). … When the Germans invaded in June 1941, the Zadarnowskis decided to return to Zoludek, where Stefan resumed his position as a forestry engineer. In September, the Germans started organizing a ghetto in Vilna and Irena decided to bring Miriam and Lilly to her home. Irena obtained all the necessary documents for the mother and child, and in a complicated operation, eventually all three of them arrived at the relative safety of Irena's home in Zoludek. Irena and Stefan's house, including the office that was always full of people, was on the forestry grounds. Furthermore, another family shared the property with them. Also, Lilly caused a lot of trouble—she was unruly, did not want to learn prayers, and always demanded to return home. After a time, problems arose in the Zadarnowskis' home. Stefan was arrested, though Irena managed to secure his release using her quick wits. However, they then had to leave Zoludek and move to Lida, to a small apartment, where Miriam and Lilly were also taken. Miriam then decided that the best way to alleviate the situation would be to volunteer for work in Germany. She reached Konstanz, on the Swiss border, where she worked as a gardener from June 1944 until the end of the war. Upon the suppression of the Warsaw uprising, the Germans deported Stefan to Dachau, where he dies. Irena then joined Miriam in Konstanz, where she too worked until the end of the war. In April 1945, Miriam, Lilly, and Irena all crossed the border to Switzerland, where Miriam discovered that her husband was still alive.[638]

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[637] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 447.

[638] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 913–14.

In the autumn of 1943, after the bloody *Aktion* perpetrated by the Germans against the Lida ghetto in the Nowogrodek [Nowogródek] district, a group of six Jews—Rachela and Shmul Geler, Moshe and Pesia Golubek, Tuvia Bielak, and Chava Muksi—escaped from the ghetto intending to join the partisans in the surrounding forest. Meanwhile, they wandered through villages and fields for several days, helped by local residents who warned them of the whereabouts of the German police who were pursuing them. One day, Wladyslaw Malachowski [Władysław Małachowski], a farmer who lived in the remote village of Plesewicze [Pleszewicze], approached them and told them that he was already hiding a Jewish refugee named Hersh Nowoplanski from the Lida ghetto in his home. Wladyslaw told them to wait at the edge of the forest until he returned with Nowoplanski. Despite certain misgivings, the refugees did as they were told and were rewarded when Wladyslaw appeared after sunset accompanied by his brother, Franciszek, and Nowoplanski, laden with bread, food, and drink. After the refugees had eaten, the Malachowski brothers took them home and hid them together with Nowoplanski. A few days later, the Malachowski brothers persuaded a group of partisans to accept the refugees into their ranks and equipped them all with rifles. All seven refugees took part in partisan activity against the Germans until the summer of 1944, when the area was liberated by the Red Army …[639]

During the war, Maria Szumska lived in Lida in the district of Nowogrodek [Nowogródek]. Before the war, she had worked as a secretary in a law court. In 1943, she welcomed eight-year-old Halina Degenfisz into her home after the girl escaped from a transport. "So as to hide a child from extermination one had to live in the country. I rented an apartment in Ossow [Ossów]," wrote Maria in her testimony to Yad Vashem. Maria and Halina stayed in Ossow until the end of the war. After the war, Halina's parents found her.[640]

In April, 1943, after a period of great suffering and torture that included the loss of their parents, 11-year-old Wolf Molczadski and his sister, Reila, fled from the Lida ghetto in the Nowogrodek [Nowogródek] district. The two children went to the home of Piotr and Stefania Pasternak, past acquaintances of their parents, and they, despite the danger to their own lives, took the two children under their wing, hiding them in the attic of their house. Motivated by pure altruism, they brought them food and took care of all their needs. … They returned to the ghetto [after six weeks], and during the liquidation in September 1943, Wolf Molczadski fled a second time, this time without his sister, who disappeared and was never heard from again. The young fugitive returned to the home of Piotr and Stefania Pasternak, who received him warmly and returned him to his hiding place, where, to his surprise, he encountered his aunt, Sara Rubinowicz, whom the Pasternaks had also taken under their wing. With the exception of a few intervals, caused by their fear that the fugitives would be discovered, the two Jews hid in the Pasternak home until March 1944. On the eve of the liberation, Molczadski and his aunt left their hiding place and hid in the Naliboki forest

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[639] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 481.

[640] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 798. Maria Szumska moved to Warsaw after the war. Halina (later Helen Degen-Cohen) did not forget her benefactor and maintained contact with Maria until the latter's death.

with the partisans of the Bielski brothers, where they remained until the liberation of the area in July 1944.[641]

[Anatol Wertheim, who joined the Soviet partisans in Naliboki forest]: We gradually developed contacts with the peasants who lived in isolated chutors. We were not afraid that they would denounce us because the peasants only wanted the Germans and partisans to leave them in peace, and they therefore tried to avoid conflicts with us too even though they must have suspected that we did not belong to the regular partisan formations … After a few encounters several families even started to treat us like old friends and invited us on their own for a drink or to spend the night under their roof.[642]

Now we spread who and wherever, nearly all into the forests, single ones to gentiles. … I ran away with my son, on the 10th of August, to Jozef [Józef] Stelmaszyk, a peasant in Mir. The Stelmaszyk family, husband and wife, middle aged, have earned being mentioned here. In the ghetto, he used to be referred to as "the righteous gentile." … During the last days of the Mir ghetto, Jews came to him, suggesting that he take their belongings as a gift. He refused, as he would not take advantage of their desperate situation. …

We stayed with the Stelmaszyks from the 13th of August till the 23rd of December, 1942, when we went into the forest, because our presence robbed them of the last traces of peace, and those good, honest people did not deserve that. Their attitude towards us in those gruelling days was so tender, so cordial, as if towards two virtual children of theirs. …

We arrive in the forest towards the end of 1942, where together with other Jews from Mir we start the epoch of the forest. … Amongst all the grown-ups there was one solitary child. That was my brother's 3-year old little girl Miryam'l … The gentiles from the village used to send her food. …

Every morning we go to the village, looking for food. The day commences with a silent prayer that there be no Germans, that the gentiles give something, and that all those going to the village come back in peace. Alas, this our last wish is not always granted. The gentiles are praiseworthy for keeping us supplied with everything, to an extent to which their facilities permitted. We were a hungry, poorly-clad camp, needy of everything, and daily we used to call on their doorsteps. …

They are talking about a search. In actual fact we a group of Jews are sitting in the forest without any means of defence whatsoever. Should a few armed policemen happen to arrive, they can seize us all alive. Still, we have no alternative. The gentiles advise us to leave.[643]

We were about a mile away from a farmer named Kurluta—the same farmer with whom I had hidden as a farmhand earlier in the summer. Kurluta was very friendly to us. He gave us food. He also gave me a rifle and a pistol, at a time when any working weapons were a treasure to us. …

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[641] Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part 2, 584–85. After the war, Wolf Molczadski (later William Moll) and his aunt, Sara Rubinowicz, emigrated to Canada.

[642] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 134.

[643] Account of Miriam Swirnowski-Lieder in Blumenthal, *Sefer Mir,* columns 52–55.

We didn't go up to the house, but we saw the Belorussian—his name, I remember, was Usik—working in the field. So we decided to approach him … He knew who we were … We told him we were hungry, we asked if he could give us something to eat. He told us that he didn't have any food to spare—all he could give us was a couple of eggs from his chicken. … The second farmer gave us something to eat—our first food since the eggs two days before. …

Later the next day we found another Belorussian farm. The farmer said, "I can't keep you for long. But you can stay overnight in this barn." …

There was a farmhouse. We decided to knock on the door. … As it happened, the man who lived there was a Belorussian who worked as a forester and had once supplied lumber to my father's factories. He said to me, "I know you. You're Schleiff's daughter. … Come in. I'll give you some food."

So we went into the house, and he gave us some hot soup. … The forester cut some blankets in half for us to have as shawls. …

There was a Belorussian farmer nearby named Petrovich. His family came from Russia, he was a friend of the Jewish partisans, and we were told that he would give Tanya shelter. Tanya agreed to this. …

They told me that they had run into my uncle Oscar. He was living on a Polish farm, passing as a Pole. He had taken up with a Polish woman, and living there with them was the woman's sister … and her brother and her brother's wife. …

There was a Polish family living in Mir—their last name was Talish. … Back in 1941, when the Germans were setting up the Mir ghetto … The Talishes would help to get us some extra food.[644]

I reached a Polish village [in the vicinity of Mir and Stołpce] where I was fed generously by a Polish farmer who even filled my bags with food for my friends in the forest.[645]

Oswald [Rufeisen] came to a large Catholic parish. … "They fed me, but made it clear that I could not stay with them." …

In Rubierzewicze [Rubieżewicze], the next town Oswald came to, he was more welcome. Here on the outskirts, in a modest hut, a Belorussian family offered him shelter. Next day these simple and kind peasants extended their hospitality for another night.[646]

However, we remained with the farmer for only a few days after that. … Wherever I came, the farmers gave me some food but didn't let me stay. I lived in barns, sheds, and wherever I could even find partial shelter. …

We moved on, farther and farther away from Glebokie [Głębokie]. We stopped at farmsteads for food and brief rests. None of the peasants was willing to shelter us for more than one night. We understood their feelings: Quite aside from their fears of being discovered by the Germans or

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[644] Sutin, *Jack and Rochelle,* 61, 76–77, 83, 84–85, 86, 133, 156.

[645] Boris Kozinitz, "A Partisan's Story," in Shtokfish, *Book in Memory of Dokshitz-Parafianow,* Chapter 4.

[646] Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 186.

denounced by the local [Belorussian] police as "Jew-lovers", the peasants had neither the room nor the food to accommodate four travelers at one time. …

I found a home on the farm of a family named Baranowski. … In return for my food and lodging, I worked for the Baranowskis as a farmhand. … I know of hundreds of peasants in the Polish and White Russian countryside who provided Jews—sometimes complete strangers—with a chance for survival, though they knew that if they were discovered by the Germans, their farms would be burned to the ground and they themselves would be gunned down together with their wives and children.

I remember the Aniszkiewicz family … Before coming to the Aniszkiewicz farmstead, the Slavins had been among the eighteen Jews fed and sheltered at various periods by the Niescierewicz [Nieścierowicz] family …

Karol and Maria Kazuro, neighbours of the Niescierewicz family, gave shelter to Wolf and Rachel Gordon and their two young children. …

I know of heroism also among the village priests … The parish priest of Dunilowicze [Duniłowicze] and Wolkolaty [Wołkołata] were feeding and sheltering Jews along with escaped prisoners of war in their parsonages.[647]

I remembered a Christian woman [in Grodno] whom I happened to know, whom I had possibly seen only twice before … [This woman she scarcely knew agreed to take her baby and place it in an orphanage.] … There was another Christian woman in the city with whom I had once worked during the time of the Soviets. I stepped into her house, and a girl friend of mine was hiding there. … I didn't ask her for much—just to keep me overnight. She couldn't help me for much longer … Everybody gave me something [in a village outside Grodno]. I did not look Jewish, but they knew—what else could be driving me in the snow through the woods? Everyone kept me for one night. … Everybody gave me warm water to wash myself. They gave me food, so that I should have strength to wander farther. And there was a priest, a Catholic. He hid me for eight days to regain my strength. But I felt compelled to go back to Grodno to find out what was going on. [With the help of some other Poles Anna K. returned to Grodno where she found her husband. Both of them decided to flee together.] …

Again I went to the suburb to an acquaintance, a Christian woman. We washed and got ready to start out at night. We rested up, then wandered on. … If only we could reach the partisans … one had to go in the direction of Szczucyn [Szczuczyn].

One night in Niemce we went into a little house. There lived a widow, a Christian—I don't know her name—with her son. It was dangerous for them, but they took us in and gave us a place to sleep and watched all night in case the Germans might come. … And in the morning they gave my husband shaving things, and they gave me plenty of food. At night we slept in an open shack, and in the morning we marched on.[648]

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[647] Riwash, *Resistance and Revenge,* 40, 46, 47, 139–44. Five members of the Nieścierowcz family from the village of Zareże near Postawy were recognized as Righteous by Yad Vashem. See Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 5: *Poland,* Part Two, 546. The Kazuro family family was recognized in 2019.

[648] See testimony of Anna K. [Kovitzka] in Donald L. Niewyk, ed., *Fresh Wounds: Early Narratives of Holocaust Survival* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 207–8.

On 3 November 1942, a day after the ghetto [in Grodno] was sealed by the Gestapo, Izak [Kobrowski] woke up [his wife] Ada and nine-year-old [daughter] Aviva … With the help of a Jewish policeman who was their friend, they passed to the Aryan side through a secret passage in the ghetto wall. …

Izak, Ada and Aviva walked away from the centre towards Grandzicka Street, where Izak had contact with a friendly Pole. Izak had a lot of friends among the Poles, dating back to his work at the trucking depot under the Soviets. He had warned many of impending arrests. …

As they went through the centre of town, Aunt Ada was recognized by a number of passersby, who had known her before her marriage as the sister of Dr. Blumstein, or just simply *Panienka* [Miss]. Some crossed themselves, some whispered '*szczesc Boze*' [*szczęść Boże*—may God help you]. Nobody denounced them. The Pole who accepted them into his apartment did not want them to stay fro more than 24 hours. They left the following day for the home of another Polish friend who lived three miles outside the city. …

The people in the village were good to them and Aviva was able to play outside. The lady of the house, however, was very afraid; her hand shook pouring hot milk into the cups at breakfast. When our former [Belorussian] hose-cook Mitroshova, who happened to live in the same village, recognized Aviva, their situation became too dangerous and they moved at night to another nearby village where two poor peasants, Stakh [Stach] and Halka, agreed to hide them for money. …

Stakh was a good-hearted man, good to Aviva and Ada, but his wife was very stupid. She prattled and blabbed to the neighbours … They decided to leave before it was too late. … Stakh accompanied the far out of the village on the side road to Pozecze [Porzecze]. He gave them food and milk for Aviva. … Along the road, peasants who knew Itchke greeted them with, '*Kobrowski, kholera na tebye, ty yeshtcho zhivyesh?*' [Kobrowski, the devil take you, are you still alive?].

After spending the night in the forest, they arrived at the small town of Pozecze. Izak left Ada and Aviva in the forest and went off to visit some peasants he knew in the area. One of them directed them to a tiny house located at the very edge of a village called Piesciuki [Pieściuki]. …

The household consisted of an elderly peasant named Michal [Michał], his wife Bozena [Bożena], their older son Michal and his wife Zosia, a younger son Lolek and his young wife Halina, who came from Warsaw, with their two small children … They were incredibly poor; they had a few acres of questionably fertile land, one horse, one emaciated cow which never gave any milk, and a few chickens. …

They remained in the house through the winter, hiding during the day behind a big cupboard and sleeping on straw on the floor. …

In May, a girl from the village herding cows to pasture came for Michal's cow. … the girl stepped into the hut, surprising Ada and Aviva. Soon the whole village knew … There was nothing they could do but leave. …

Izak decided to push further east into the dense Lithuanian forests near his native Marcinkance [Marcinkańce]. …

They walked and walked for half the night until they finally reached a village where Izak new a number of peasants. It was a large village with a mixed population of Poles and Lithuanians—an explosive mixture. The peasant who gave them shelter was Polish and very poor. They were hidden in the stye, on the planks in the straw, above the pigs and the cow. … They decided not to go far. The dense forest, where Germans rarely ventured, offered protection. Another Jewish family from

> Druskieniki joined them and together they built their camp some three to four miles from the village. The villagers were glad to sell them potatoes, onions and peas.[649]
>
> Shiel Fisher worked for a Polish farmer so that he could get his work permit extended to go outside the city. As he walked from the village of Azginovici [Ozgmowicze] to Slonim [Słonim], he stopped at Polish homes; everywhere he was received in a friendly manner and given something to eat. One woman even repaired his torn coat. Often these Byelorussians would rage against the German persecution of Jews. "Don't be afraid of us," one of them said to him. "We are not Nazis!" …
>
> In early February 1943 [1944?] the Kovpak army marched through Hotsk and the Jewish partisans from Slonim met some of the 250 Jewish Kovpakites. … All the able-bodied men and women were taken into the army. The weaker and older Jews were put in the baggage wagons and taken to a safe place where they were hidden by trustworthy peasants—mostly Poles who had sought Kovpak's protection against the Nazis and their Ukrainian helpers.[650]
>
> The villagers of Yavishtza [?] were friendly to partisans and Jews. They would supply us with cooked food and foodstuffs.[651]

There are scores of additional accounts attesting to widespread assistance provided by Poles and

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[649] Alexandre Blumstein, *A Little House on Mount Carmel* (London and Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2002), 330–35.

[650] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 364, 313.

[651] Cholawski, *Soldiers from the Ghetto,* 84.

Belorussians in the Wilno and Nowogródek regions.[652] They did so at great personal risk, often paying with their lives. Before rushing to condemn Poles and Belorussians for not sacrificing more on behalf of the Jews, it is worth noting the reception that a Jewish family, the Kahns, received when they relocated to the ghetto in Grodno from October to December 1942, after witnessing the liquidation of the ghettos in

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[652] See, for example, the following accounts. The family of Rut Leisner from Mejszagoła near Wilno, received extensive assistance from many Poles, often total strangers. See Marian Turski, ed., *Losy żydowskie: Świadectwo żywych,* vol. 2 (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Żydów Kombatantów i Poszkodowanych w II Wojnie Światowej, 1999), 204–25. Soszana Raczyńska of Wilno was one of many Jews helped by Poles in the vicinity of Niemenczyn. See Isakiewicz, *Harmonica,* 87–105. Pola Wawer, a doctor from Wilno, recalled the help she and her parents received from numerous Poles in various localities, among them the hamlet of Zameczek which was inhabited by five families of cousins. See Wawer, *Poza gettem i obozem,* passim, especially 71. After escaping from the Wilno ghetto in September 1943, Adam Nowicki (born in 1932), his sister and their mother were sheltered by a Polish woman named Marynia in Wilno, and subsequently by a doctor who lived near the edge of the Rudniki forest. See Katarzyna Meloch and Halina Szostkiewicz, eds., *Dzieci holocaustu mówią…,* vol. 3 (Warsaw: Biblioteka Midrasza and Stowarzyszenie "Dzieci Holocaust" w Polsce, 2008), 95–96. Murray Berger of Wsielub near Nowogródek attests to receiving extensive help from numerous villagers from December 1941, when he left the ghetto, until he joined up with the Bielski unit the following year. (Berger's account is found in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives.) Sarah Fishkin of Rubieżewicze left a diary attesting to repeated acts of kindness by villagers in that area. See Anna Eilenberg-Eibeshitz, *Remember! A Collection of Testimonies* (Haifa: H. Eibeshitz Institute for Holocaust Studies, 1999), 285–306. Chana Mirski (later Hana Shachar), born at the end of 1939 or early 1940, was given over for safekeeping by her paternal grandfather, Nathan Mirski, to his acquaintance, Stanisław Świetlikowski, who smuggled her out of the ghetto in Podbrodzie, a town northeast of Wilno, in September 1941. Stanisław and his wife Katarzyna had the child baptized, as their own. Given her age at the time, it would have been apparent to the priest, even if he had not been not told, that the child was likely Jewish. The birth and baptismal certificate facilitated the cover-up. Their neighbours also figured out that the sudden new addition to the family was a Jewish child, yet no one denounced them. See Świetlikowski Family, The Righteous Database, Yad Vashem, Internet: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=8995952>. A large group of Jews led by Bielicer, based in forests near Zaczepicze about ten kilometres from Bielica, received extensive assistance from the surrounding population. See the testimony of Lejb Rajzer, dated 1945, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/555. Shimon Kantorowicz was sheltered for two years by the Krepski family in Helenów near Stłopce and, even though this was known to almost the entire village, no one betrayed him. Information from Yad Vashem file no. 5844. Another Jew recalled the assistance he and his father received from the villagers of Powiłańce near Ejszyszki, on numerous occasions: "The village was composed of some forty houses strung out side by side on a single street. Each house was inhabited by Poles, but my father knew many of them and had done favours for them in the past. At each house, we knocked and explained our plight. Only a few turned us down … Very soon our wagon was filled with butter and eggs and flour and fresh vegetables, and my father and I wept at their kindness and at the realization that we had been reduced to beggars. The people of Powielancy [Powiłańce] were so generous … Now we sent out a food gathering group each evening to beg in the neighbouring villages where most of the people felt kindly toward us. One of the villages in this area was Powielancy whose people had filled our cart with food when father and I had come from the Radun [Raduń] ghetto. They helped us again most willingly for they sympathized with our plight." See Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 55, 124. The nearby village of Mieżańce is mentioned in several accounts as friendly to the Jews. See Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2003), 19; testimony of Beniamin Rogowski, March 14, 1965, Yad Vashem Archives, file 03/2820. Meir Stoler, who escaped the German massacre of Jews in Raduń on May 10, 1942, managed to reach the tiny Polish hamlet of Mieżańce, where the villagers took him in and gave him food. See Martin Gilbert, *The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust* (Toronto: Key Porter, 2003), 19. Boris and Gitel Smolnik were sheltered by the Korobiec family in Porzecze near Grodno. Their neighbours were aware of the Smolniks' presence, but no one denounced them. See Emilia Korobiec, the Righteous Database, Yad Vashem, Internet: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=7026931>. Shulamit Schreyber Żabinska, a teenage girl who was sheltered by Poles in the Wilno countryside, recalled that many Poles brought food to the ghetto, "otherwise everyone would have starved to death. It was dangerous, and people were shot for this." After escaping from the ghetto she was taken in by Weronika ("Wercia") Stankiewicz and her mother, passing as Wercia's niece. Although the villagers knew she was Jewish no one betrayed her. See Tomaszewski and Werbowski, *Zegota*, 117–18; *Żegota,* 2nd edition, 110; and *Code Name: Żegota,* 3rd edition, 117. Similarly, Estera Bielicka was taken in by the Myślicki family in Matejkany (Motejkany) where she lived openly. Although the villagers knew about her Jewish origin, no one betrayed her. See Wiktor Noskowski, "Czy Yaffa Eliach przeprosi Polaków?" *Myśl Polska* (Warsaw), July 20–27, 1997. Joanna Malberg lived openly in the town of Niemenczyn under an assumed identity, working as a private French teacher. Since she had a marked Semitic appearance, it was widely suspected she was of Jewish origin. See Gutman and Bender, *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous Among the Nations,* vol. 4: *Poland,* Part 1, 58–59; Antonowicz Family, The Righteous Database, Yad Vashem, Internet: <http://db.yadvashem.org/righteous/family.html?language=en&itemId=4024932>; Testimony of Wacława Dobrzyńska, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute

Ejszyszki and Raduń. The large ghetto in Grodno, which held some 15,000 Jews, was cordoned off by a barbed fence with fortified guard towers. Although the ghetto dwellers only received about 200 calories per day, they appeared remarkably healthy because of a well-organized smuggling ring which managed to obtain huge quantities of food (eggs, milk and flour) from local farmers. The ring even sold "excess" provisions and bread to Christian residents of Grodno outside the ghetto.

When these recent arrivals detected signs of the impending liquidation of the ghetto and warned their co-religionists, the reaction was disbelief and hostility. They were accused of spreading rumours to create panic and of being Communists who were deservedly punished by the Germans. Finally, they were ordered by the Judenrat to be silent or face being turned over to the Germans. Within the ghetto, they felt totally alienated. The Grodno Jews "were cold and inhospitable, and never even offered us a place to sleep, though many had extra room." After the synagogue service one Friday evening, the shames announced that "there were strangers in the midst of the congregation who were homeless and had lost all their possessions. Would someone take these unfortunates home to share the Sabbath meal with them?" Kahn recalled their reaction: "We went to stand by the door so the congregation could see us easily as they filed out. Family by family left, carefully avoiding our eyes until at last our little group stood there alone."[653]

Some 2,000 Jews from Międzyrzec and Kraków were brought by the Germans to Baranowicze. They arrived in a very precarious state, dressed in rags and hungry after their long journey. The Jews of Baranowicze did not want to reside together with these out-of-town Jews because they thought that the new arrivals faced a more imminent prospect of death. Therefore a separate ghetto was set up for them inside the main ghetto; it was surrounded by a wire fence and guarded by the Jewish police so as to prevent the new arrivals from entering the larger ghetto. These Jews endured sickness and poor food rations, and had to beg for handouts from the residents of the larger ghetto.[654] A group of Jewish fugitives from Raków in vain sought the assistance of Jews in inhospitable Gródek (Horodek) and then had to move on to other towns. Few Jews were prepared to take on the risk of sheltering others:

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[653] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 94–96. It is worth noting that there were many Jews who were assisted by Poles in the Grodno area (some examples were provided earlier). See also Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 180–85. Sympathy for outsiders was not a hallmark of ghetto life. In Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, for example, the Judenrat moved energetically to rid the ghetto of Jewish deportees from Vienna, who were relatively well off, and in the process confiscated much of their possessions. See Waldemar R. Brociek, Adam Penkalla, Regina Renz, *Żydzi ostrowieccy: Zarys Dziejów* (Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski: Muzeum Historyczno-Archeologiczne, 1996), 101. The example of relative prosperity in the Grodno ghetto is not an isolated one. Conditions in ghettos varied from place to place and could change overnight. A resident of the ghetto in Raduń near Ejszyszki recalled: "there was no instance of actual starvation. Mutual help was commonplace, and all the needy would receive daily food rations, contributed and distributed voluntarily by the Jews of Radun." See Aviel, *A Village Named Dowgalishok,* 92. In the Wilno ghetto trade flourished as late as March 1942: "Now, people carry on free and open [commerce] … Little shops opened … Peasants who come in to take out garbage bring merchandise into the ghetto, and there is trade in the ghetto the likes of which have never been seen. … Outside the ghetto, they say that the Jews in the ghetto live better than the residents of the city. There's some truth to that. In this respect, the ghetto is much livelier and more active than are the inhabitants outside the ghetto." See Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania,* 243. For information about the wide-scale smuggling of goods from the "Aryan" side see pp. 595–96. Kruk mentions other paradoxes of the German occupation: "Aryans who want to save themselves from Aryan-German hands come for asylum to … the ghetto"; "Germans have no trust in the Aryan Poles, Russians, and Lithuanians. But, on the contrary, their Jewish slaves are their best…co-workers." Ibid., 479.

[654] Testimony of Alina Colle [Culk], dated December 15, 1947, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/4009.

> We arrived there [in Horodek] early in the morning and knocked on the first door we saw but no one answer. In the morning we saw Jews going to the synagogue with talit in their arms as if nothing had changed, but no one agreed to take us home since doing so would have been a death sentence to their community. We were very hungry but had no choice but to return to our haven of the last few days in the forest.
>
> They were too fearful to let us in Horodok [Horodek]. They sent us to Lebadova [Łebiedziew]. There we stayed for five days and from there they sent us to Vileika [Wilejka]. … Shmukler, who was originally from Rakov [Raków] … let us stay with him for a few days, and then sent us to Kurenitz [Kurzeniec].[655]

When Jewish doctors and dentists in Nowogródek were offered a reprieve by the Germans, a Jewish woman was turned down when she asked for their assistance to save herself and her children from death:

> We were in a room with all the doctors and dentists and their families. … Among the doctors was one bachelor, Dr. [Mark] Berkman, to whom Mina offered some money if he would only say she was his wife. (Only women with men would survive!) He refused out of sheer fear of jeopardizing his own safety. Later on we saw he could have saved her and the children. Everybody was trying, somehow, to find a haven.[656]

A group of Jews who were given shelter at a Benedictine convent in Wilno had to be persuaded by the Mother Superior, Sister Maria Mikulska, to allow more Jews to come into their hideout. According to Samuel Bak,

> It was Maria who convinced the group in hiding to take in a woman and a child. She exclaimed to them our state of total despair. Sending us back would have meant our death. The nine people had a hard choice to make, and they vacillated, as clearly we would take up a part of their space as well as some of the very limited portions of available food. Moreover, a few of them were afraid our presence could increase their chance of being detected. But Maria made it clear how much she cared about us. The group could not afford to alienate her.[657]

Similarly, many Jews in the Bielski burgeoning unit were opposed to accepting new members into their ranks:

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[655] H. Abramson, ed., *Sefer zikaron le-kehilat Rakow* (Tel Aviv: Former Residents of Rakow in Israel and the U.S.A., 1959), 141 ff.; translated as *Rakow Community Memorial Book*, Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/rakow/rakow.html>. The Jews were eventually taken in by Christians and survived the war. When the survivors returned to Raków after the Soviet entry, "As soon as the Catholic priest of the town found out that a few of us returned, he called us and asked if there was anything we wished him to do. We requested that on Sunday he announce to the Church that the Christians should return what they robbed from the Jewish homes. He did as we asked …"

[656] Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 72.

[657] Gilbert, *The Righteous,* 80.

> "There are more than twenty of us and already there is nothing to eat. What will we eat if there are more?" …
>
> Still there were further murmurs of disapproval.
>
> "We have lost our wives and our children and you want us to go into the ghetto to bring out strangers?" said one of the newcomers.[658]
>
> People grumbled when the old and sick or the young and vulnerable arrived, said Lilka Tiktin, the teenage girl who had escaped from Lida ghetto with her father, stepmother, and stepbrother. "People said, 'We don't need them. We don't need them.'"[659]
>
> Some of the fighters, tired of the aggravation of supporting the unarmed and helpless *malbushim* [Hebrew for "clothes," but in this context "worthless"], spoke about leaving to form their own units.[660]

To be sure, not all Jews were grateful for the assistance they received from the Christian population. In some cases, the hospitality of their hosts was severely abused. For example, Anna Kaplinska, a Jew from Wilno, was sheltered and given false documents by Maria Stefańska, a member of the Polish underground. When Kaplinska left her hiding place and joined the Lenin Brigade in the fall of 1943, not only did she steal her benefactor's valuables, but she also betrayed many members of the Polish underground who

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[658] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 89.

[659] Ibid., 111.

[660] Ibid., 115.

maintained contact with Stefańska.[661] Like other nationalities, Jews also had their share of collaborators

[661] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 139–40; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 115.

who assisted the Germans both inside and outside the ghettos.[662]

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[662] The following examples are illustrative. Jacob Gens, the head of the Jewish Council in Wilno, sent Jewish policemen to Oszmiana and other outlying towns to assist in the liquidation of the ghettos. The Wilno policemen included Salek Dessler, Natan Ring, Meir Levas, Berenshetein, and Leizer Bart. A Jewish policeman from Wilno named Nika Drezin, who "betrayed melinas [hideouts] freely," was put in charge of the ghetto in Oszmiana, which the Jewish police helped the Germans to liquidate. The Jews in Oszmiana were rounded up and transported by train to Ponary for extermination. See Gelbart, *Sefer Zikaron le-kehilat Oshmana,* 25–31, 115; Cohen, *The Avengers,* 70–73; Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania,* 411; Nathan Cohen, "The Last Days of the Vilna Ghetto—Pages from a Diary," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 31 (2003): 36, 42; Margolis, *A Partisan from Vilna,* 331. At least three Gestapo agents were planted at the H.K.P. work camp in Wilno: Nika Drezin, Auberbach and Jona Bak. See "Life Story of Perella née Esterowicz (Pearl Good)," Internet: <http://www.eilatgordinlevitan.com/vilna/vilna_pages/vilna_stories_perella.html>. The Jewish police arrested several hundred Jewish fugitives near the entrance to the Wilno ghetto and notified the Gestapo, who took them to be executed in Ponary. See Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 84. A Jewish policeman betrayed a tunnel dug out of the HKP labour camp in Wilno to the Germans, who killed all those inside it, thereby bringing escapes from that camp to a halt. See Levin, *Fighting Back,* 115. The Jewish policeman Segal was kidnapped and executed after betraying Jewish partisans who had come to the Wilno ghetto to bring out Jews to join the partisans See the testimony of Mojżesz Bielak, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/3327. The Germans employed a Jewish woman whom they had apprehended with false papers as a confidante to seek out other Jews hiding on the Aryan side in Wilno. See Grynberg and Kotowska, *Życie i zagłada Żydów polskich 1939–1945,* 540. The activities of a Jewish Gestapo agent named Goldin, operating among the Jewish partisans in the Wilno area, are referred to in Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 310–11. The Bielski partisans executed a number of Jews who had been dispatched by the Germans to infiltrate their detachment. See Kuszelewicz, *Un Juif de Biélorussie de Lida à Karaganda,* 83–84. For Jewish policemen who collaborated with the Gestapo in Kaunas see Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945,* 235, 291–95, 346. In Lida, a group of Jews was apprehended for robbing Jewish property left for safekeeping with a local priest, apparently Orthodox, a trusted friend of the Jews. The priest had been badly wounded with brass knuckles to the head. When the Jewish Council refused to intercede to obtain their release from prison, the Jewish detainees told the German authorities about the residence permits the council had arranged for Jewish refugees from Wilno by paying off Polish municipal clerks, thereby endangering the lives of all involved. Local Jews were coopted to identify all those who came from Wilno. As a result, 75 or 80 Jews were arrested and were executed by the Germans together with the members of the Jewish council. See Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 212; Kruk, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania,* 235–36, 610. A Jew informed on twenty Jews for cooperating with a partisan group in the vicinity of Wołkowysk, resulting in their arrest. The informer was killed clandestinely by the Jewish council and police. See Moses Einhorn, "The Extermination of the Volkovysk Community and Surrounding Towns," in Moses Einhorn, ed., *Wolkovisker Yizkor* Book (New York, 1949), 346–47, Part I of *The Volkovysk Memorial Book*. A Jew by the name of Białobroda who had worked as an informer for the Belorussian police in the Lida ghetto was eventually executed by the Bielski unit for plotting against Tuvia Bielski. See Tec, *Defiance,* 177–78. A Jew by the name of Lansman (Haim Lantzman), who was a Gestapo agent in the Nowogródek ghetto, and was responsible for the deaths of many Jews, was executed by the Bielski unit when he was sent to the forest as an informer. (Allegedly his wife had been imprisoned by the Germans and he agreed to find the partisan base and betray its location). See Tec, *Defiance,* 176–77; Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 69–70; Smilovitskii, *Katastrofa evreev v Belorussii 1941–1944 gg.,* 299–300. Another Jew who was planted in the Jewish camp in Nowogródek was executed by the leaders of the underground by beheading in February 1943. Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 170; Lubow, *Escape,* 43. The German Sicherheitsdienst (security services) "kept installing agents among the Jewish population in the ghetto" of Słonim. One of them was a refugee from Warsaw named Mariampol; another informer was Sarah, the daughter of a poor old Jewish woman whom she renounced, who "gave the Germans much useful information." See Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 144–45, 152, 241, 339. Oswald Rufeisen was betrayed by a Jewish collaborator in Mir named Stanisławski. See Sutin, *Jack and Rochelle,* 59–60. A Jew named Schulzinger, from the town of Szczuczyn, informed on Jews who were planning to break out of the forced labour camp in Wilejka Stara near Mołodeczno; all those left in the camp were killed, except for a small group who managed to flee. See Yehuda Bauer, "Jewish Baranowicze in the Holocaust," *Yad Vashem Studies,* vol. 31 (2003): 121. Witnesses report on "traitors and enemy agents" in the ghetto in Baranowicze. The Germans became aware of the existence of a well-armed underground in that ghetto and "were employing Jewish spies to acquire information about it." The planned revolt in the ghetto was foiled. Ibid., 136, 148. An escape of Jews from a Luftwaffe base in or near Baranowicze was betrayed by a Jewish teenager from Łódź who worked there and informed the German commander about the underground group. Ibid., 136. Jewish collaborators were also a source of danger for the Polish underground. Jerzy Ripper, the chief of the Sicherheitsdienst intelligence service in Lida, was responsible for the arrest of many members of the Home Army. See Cezary Chlebowski, *Gdy las był*

10. Procuring Arms and Armed Raids

As the demands of feeding and clothing thousands of Jewish fugitives grew, many forest people and partisans acquired arms and resorted increasingly to threats and force to obtain food, clothing and other items. A Jewish woman who joined the Soviet partisans in Naliboki forest reported candidly that armed Jewish groups were known to "terrorize" villagers.[663] With the intensification of provision-gathering expeditions or raids, the peasants were literally stripped of their food supplies and belongings. (Polish partisans were forbidden, by order of Home Army Commander Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski, to take provisions from the civilian population without payment. This order was generally adhered to.[664]) Moreover, the Germans and their auxiliaries became increasingly more ruthless in punishing those who assisted Jewish fugitives. Understandably, the mood of the peasants changed and they grew fearful and resentful.

While postwar accounts stress the anti-German activities of the large Jewish groups under the command of Bielski and Zorin, in reality they engaged in very little combat activity against the Germans. Their principal and almost exclusive task was raiding local farms for food and other provisions.[665] As a rule, only Jews incorporated into the ranks of Soviet combat units participated in military ventures against the

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[663] Testimony of Elżbieta Marchwińska (née Estera Świerzewska), the wife of Józef Marchwiński (Bielski's second in command for a time), in Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 254.

[664] German field reports from the Wilno area indicate that Polish partisans, who came from the ranks of the local population, were a disciplined group who enjoyed widespread popular support. They requisitioned only the most needed food provisions, for which they issued receipts, or were provided food willingly by the Polish population to whom they offered protection from marauding groups. See Jarosław Wołkonowski, "Rozmowy polsko-niemieckie w lutym 1944 roku w świetle nowych dokumentów niemieckich," in Wołkonowski, *Sympozjum historyczne "Rok 1944 na Wileńszczyźnie,"* 98. Disciplinary transgressions were infrequent and were punished very by the Home Army. In some cases, its own members were known to have been executed for robbery and other crimes including those directed at non-Poles (such as Jews and Lithuanians). Ibid., 244; Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 90; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 88 (for banditry directed at civilians and a Jew); Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 46; Borodziewicz, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK,* 189 (for theft of a kerchief from a Lithuanian woman); Kiersnowski, *Tam i wtedy,* 92; Sten, 47 (a memoir of a Jew cited earlier). In the early stages, when relations between Polish and Soviet partisans were still civil, Polish partisans were also punished for transgressions against Soviet partisans. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 111. Of course, there were exceptions. One villager describes how members of the Home Army, employing violence, demanded provisions in Kul, near Rubieżewicze, a village that was in the Soviet zone. That same village was also plundered by Jewish partisans. See Kazimierz Bondarewicz, "Mój Kul," in Jasiewicz, *Europa nieprowincjonalna,* 890, 893; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 206.

[665] The Bielski and Zorin units, which consisted for the most part of family camps, were not part of the regular Soviet partisans and did not generally engage in military operations, so it is questionable whether they can properly be called partisan units. To the limited extent that some of their armed members were involved in military operations, those activities occurred under the command of Soviet partisan leaders. See Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 115; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 74, 84. Of Bielski's group Nechama Tec writes: "the burden of feeding the people fell upon the young male fighters who devoted most of their energies to gathering provisions. Food expeditions were exhausting and dangerous, sometimes ending in the death of the participants." See Nechama Tec, "Jewish Resistance in Belorussian Forests: Fighting and the Rescue of Jews by Jews," in Rohrlich, *Resisting the Holocaust,* 84.

Germans, and even these rarely entailed direct enemy confrontations, and young armed Jews were pressured to leave Bielski's group to join those units.[666]

Some members of the Bielski group are quite candid about why they had escaped from the ghettos:

> "Our aim was to survive. When we left for the forest we felt that it was close to the end and so we wanted to live. We did not plan to fight the Germans, we thought about staying alive."
>
> "If someone tells you that when he went to the partisans he was motivated by a desire to fight … that is incorrect. All of us left the ghetto in the hope of staying alive. We hoped for a chance. … They did not leave to fight, they left to live."[667]

Once in the forest, Tuvia Bielski cautioned them repeatedly:

> "Don't rush to fight and die. So few of us are left, we have to save lives. To save a Jew is much more important than to kill Germans."[668]

Jews who joined the Bielski unit wrote:

> The main actions were not fighting the Germans; instead all they aimed for was to survive until days of peace and all they took care of was supplying food and clothing for the Jewish people. I must emphasize they were very successful in their mission.[669]
>
> We needed cows for meat and milk, so we had to take them from farmers and villagers who owned at least a few. … However, they did not give their animals to us willingly, of course. We had to resort to threats and lies. We proclaimed with bravado that we were members of a large army with plenty of ammunition who were capable of causing great destruction.[670]

The nature and extent of these so-called "economic" operations have been described in many Holocaust testimonies. The descriptions of these raids, reproduced later, fully support the widely held impression of the local population that Jews were indeed the most rapacious of all the forest pillagers. They seized not only large quantities of food and livestock, but also clothing such as boots and coats, and other belongings

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[666] Tec, *Defiance,* 80, 83.

[667] Quoted in Tec, *Defiance,* 48–49.

[668] Tec, *Defiance,* 82.

[669] Gdaliyau Dudman, "Vishnevo during the War," in Abramson, *Wiszniew, As It Was and Is No More,* 125 ff.

[670] Shor and Zakin, *Essie,* 45–46. Essie (Esia) Lewin, later Shor, was one of two teenage girls with arms who went on raids for food. Ibid., 57.

such as blankets, furniture and even jewelry. Moreover, they frequently resorted to violence to achieve their goals.[671] It must be borne in mind that typically a peasant's home was a very small one or two-room wooden cottage with a thatched roof, and often did not even have a wooden floor.

The Jews required arms to carry out their raids effectively. Sometimes they brought weapons with them when they escaped from the ghettos. These weapons had been either stolen from workshops or acquired from illicit sources, often with the help of local Poles and Belorussians or the Polish underground.[672] Once outside the ghetto, some Jews obtained weapons from the local population.[673] (Although both the retreating Polish army, in September 1939, and the Soviet army, in June 1941, discarded large quantities of weapons, unlike Poles and Belorussians, Jews rarely undertook the risky business of collecting and hiding these.)

Unfortunately, rather than negotiate with the peasants, many Jews chose confrontation. A Jewish woman who fled the ghetto in Lida recalled that her group did not waste time in putting their weapons to good use.

> His neighbour in the ghetto a locksmith was working in a German munition factory. Everyday the locksmith smuggled into the ghetto parts of a gun, till it became a revolver. The wooden parts the carpenter provided, thus we accumulated 20 rifles.
>
> We continuously made plans how to escape from the ghetto … We decided to transport the rifles out of the ghetto. We put the rifles a few at a time in a barrel of human waste that Zuckerman transported daily out of the ghetto …
>
> To the forest we were able to escape individually out of the ghetto, at night we got together rather a large group. … We walked only at night, hiding during the day. … we had our weapons so we

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[671] That is why, as noted earlier, in negotiations with the Soviet partisans, the Polish side often complained specifically about the activities of Jewish marauders.

[672] See, for example, the account of Moses Meierson: "Many of our younger men … stole arms and escaped to the forest. Weapons were cached in secret hiding places in the ghetto. Within four weeks, the first contingent made off, fully armed." See Leo W. Schwarz, *The Root and the Bough: The Epic of an Enduring People* (New York: Rinehard & Company, 1949), 95. In Głębokie, "While we were in the ghetto, we warned everyone we could to distrust the Germans and try to get out as soon as possible. We advised the young people to search for arms and come to the partisans in the forests to fight the Germans. We gave them directions on how to find us and other partisan groups. (Later, many of these same young people came with rifles to join our group.)" See Aron, *Fallen Leaves,* 84. In Lida, the Jewish underground, many of whose members later fled to the forests, was able to obtain arms from the storerooms in the former Polish military barracks; Jewish labouers sometimes managed to steal arms and spare parts and smuggle them into the ghetto. Some of the arms were acquired from non-Jews. See Spector, *Lost Jewish Worlds,* 214. In Baranowicze, teenaged Jewish girls who cleaned the German garrison, which housed a stockpile of abandoned Soviet military hardware, smuggled out parts of rifles stolen and dismantled by young Jewish men working there. See Berk, *Destined to Live,* 76. A Christian farmer helped to smuggle weapons out of the ghetto for Jews from Krasne who escaped to the forest and joined the partisans. See the account of Moshe Baran in Brostoff and Chamovitz, *Flares of Memory,* 185. For a description of weapon gathering activities in Kurzeniec see the account of Zalman Uri Gurevitz in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.* Nachum Katz from Meszajgoła, who was imprisoned in a camp outside of Wilno, managed to procure arms (revolvers, grenades) for the ghetto via contacts he established with the Home Army. One of the liaison men betrayed him and the Jewish ghetto police handed him over to the Gestapo, but fortunately Katz was released and survived the war. See the account of Rut Leisner in Turski, *Losy żydowskie,* vol. 2, 211–13.

[673] The Bielski brothers, for example, acquired their first weapons from Christian acquaintances; another group used the services of a Jewish "go-between" who had his own suppliers; yet another group purchased weapons directly from peasants. See Tec, *Defiance,* 34, 59, 71. Tec's book provides copious details of expeditions to gather food and other supplies the Bielski group engaged in, often with the use of force. Ibid., 37, 39, 41, 46, 68, 72–73, 86, 101, 105, 107, 110, 115, 140–41, 142–43, 148, 151, 161, 178, 179, 193.

> entered a peasants hut took his horse and wagon, and drove through side roads to the "Natcher Wilderness" [Nacza forest].
>
> There in that area we found a few Jewish families, that were organized into a "Jewish Partisan Otriad." They happily accepted us, because of our 20 rifles.[674]

A group of Jews who escaped from a work camp in Nowogródek set out to procure arms from villagers by force before joining up with the Soviet partisans.

> When we escaped, we had only one pistol among all of us. During the day, we would sleep in the forest, and with the night, we would get up and go to look for bread and anything else in addition to it. Because we knew the area well, we knew which of the peasants had Soviet arms; we would come at night, wake him up from his sleep, and ask him to give us his rifle, and if not, we told him to grab a shovel and start digging a hole for himself. In regards to food, we didn't run into difficulty, but regarding armaments, we had to deal pretty harshly with them, to the point where the children would start to cry and beg: father, give them the rifle—so that they don't kill you … in this manner, we accumulated arms for 14 men.[675]

A similar tactic was employed by a group of Jews who formed a partisan group near Dziewieniszki. There are two versions of this story, one more gruesome than the other:

> We hoped to form a large and powerful partisan force that would instill fear in Divenishok [Dziewieniszki], and the region, becoming a strong supporter of Jews still hiding in various places. We began to organize for that purpose. Mishka Lytnent [a young Russian man] was appointed as commander. The group was composed of 11 armed people and 7 unarmed. Our first mission was to obtain weapons for the remainder of the members. …
>
> We had unique methods of obtaining weapons. When we learned a farmer had weapons we would appear and ask for them. When he refused, we threatened that we would search the house and of we found weapons we would burn the house down. To frighten him, we would order him

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674 "A Child Partisan from Voronova," in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 2 (1985), 613. This account may refer to the so-called "Todros" or "Todras" group led by Elka Ariovitz based in Nacza forest.

675 Eliyahu Kovensky, "The Path of Suffering and Heroism," in Lashowitz, *Volkovysk,* 132, Part III of *The Volkovysk Memorial Book*.

to bring straw from the barn to burn the house, until he relented and brought the weapon. Then he would receive some blows for not complying.[676]

One Gentile, as revenge against his neighbor, told us that his neighbor owned two quality Polish rifles. We went in a group of eight men to take the weapons. We reached the farmer's house at night and a few men remained outside to guard the men who entered the house carrying sticks resembling guns. We read an "order by partisan headquarters" which we wrote before we left. It said in Russian that he must give the rifles he owned to the Partisans. The Gentile shook in fear, denied he had weapons, crawled on the floor, and begged for his life. We attempted to influence him in any way to tell us where the weapons were, but to no avail. Even after sustaining an assault he continued saying that he had no weapons and was being framed. We took him out to the yard, bound his hands and legs with the rope from the well, and immersed him in water repeatedly, but he did not relent. I proposed scaring him with the lives of his wife and children. We placed his wife and children in the house and locked the door. We tied the farmer to a tree so he could watch his family burn. "After that," I threatened him, "I will kill you with this grenade I am holding." After he saw us approaching the house to burn it down he broke and fearfully announced he would hand over the guns. He led us to the swamps behind the village where the guns were hidden in a hollow tree; they were two new Polish rifles, still with grease. "Go to my brother who lives in a nearby *hutur* and he will give you 140 bullets." We thanked the Gentile and did so.[677]

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[676] Tsvi Novopolanski, "In the Ghettos and the Woods with Partisans," in Shtokfish, *Sefer Divenishok,* 136 ff. Novopolanski describes an encounter with "White Poles" when his group of six armed men carried out a raid on a village. After loading up three horse-bound sleighs with food and clothing, "As we turned the sleighs around, armed people came out of the woods on foot and on horseback and opened fire. … [we] began a close combat with the Poles." He also describes how Jewish partisans "decided to settle the score with" a farmer in "Kalelishok" (Konwaliszki), who had handed over two Jewish brothers to the "White Poles" in the summer of 1943, after setting a trap for them. "We put a bullet in his head, executed his family, and burned the farm. We left a white sheet on which we wrote in their blood, 'blood for blood. Jewish blood will not be disregarded! Dog death for dogs!'" (See also the following footnote for a different versions of this story.) He also describes the exploits of a Soviet partisan group named "Thunder" (*Perkūnas*), which he joined in Rudniki forest, including fantastic claims such as the following: "sabotage missions against German army bases"; "We went to blow up bridges and railways every evening"; "the destruction of telegraph poles spanning 5 km and the destruction of train tracks for many kilometers." During the battle for Wilno, Novopolanski claimed to have executed 63 captured SS men on orders from a Jewish company commander: "I put them up against the wall and finished them off with a large burst from the machine gun. That was a happy feeling I had not yet encountered." After the conquest of the city, he was drafted as an accountant for the NKVD at Łuskiszki prison.

[677] Michael Dubinski, "From Partisan Unit—to the *Palmach* Brigade," in Shtokfish, *Sefer Divenishok,* 200 ff. Dubinski describes the murder of Shlomo Olkenitski and his brother rather differently than Novopolanski, who attributes their killing to "White Poles," greatly reduces the extent of retaliation: "we learned that the Gentile had set a trap for them and invited Lithuanian policemen. When the men appeared, the policemen presented themselves as Russian partisans and tried to discover the hiding spot of the entire group. The men recognized the trap and wanted to leave. The Lithuanians stopped them and murdered them in the Gentile's yard. Six months later we came at night and burned his barn. We could not storm his house because he opened heavy fire." Yet another version has Szlomo Olkenicki, a machine-gunner in the "Thunder" unit, being killed together with his mother (a cook for the unit) by "White Poles" in July 1943, yet taking part in the destruction of the village of Koniuchy, which occurred in January 1944. See *Biographical Dictionary of Jewish Resistance: Jewish Partisans and Underground Fighters in Western Soviet Territory,* vol. 1, Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Lexicon/lex041.html>. Dubinski describes how Russian partisans used the ruse of recruiting Jews in order to confiscate their weapons.

A Jew who escaped from the ghetto in Głębokie, together with some fourteen Jews who had acquired arms from farmers and other sources, recalled that this group immediately followed the path of intimidation, taking by threat of force all that they needed.

> Many more [Jews in the ghetto] asked to join us but we could not comply as they were weaponless. …
>
> After putting a few kilometers between us and the railway we decided to stock up on food supplies. We knocked on the window in one of the farmhouses, and addressed them in the German language. When they saw we were armed, they became scared and gave us all that we wanted. We left immediately and reached the forest at dawn.
>
> We continued and after a long way knocked on the doors of farmers. We got from them wagons and horses and that same night, reached one of the contact men, not far from Wolkolati [Wołkołata]. …
>
> … In the forest we met two Jewish partisans from "The People's Avengers". Their names were: Sagalchik [Y. Sigaltchik] from Dolginova [Dołhinów] and "Zoska of Estonia" (a Jew from Estonia). They set out on order from their regiment, which was staying on the other side of the Berezina [Berezyna River], in the Plestchenitz area, near Minsk. They went on reconnaissance since the regiment was getting ready for fighting in the western area, and to get food. They took us with them then and we were introduced to their commander. They promised us that we would be accepted to their group as we were young, without families and armed.[678]

A large group of young Jews who escaped from the ghetto in Prużana in January 1943, taking with them some weapons, began to resort to robbery soon after arriving in the forest.

> … we met more people from the ghetto, and the next night more people came and we were around sixty or seventy. We decided to divide ourselves into smaller groups but not to separate too far from each other.
>
> We lived like this for a few days. But we were hungry. We had nothing to eat. We didn't take any utensils with us. … The older people knew the surrounding areas. They said, "We will go out to the village and we'll bring some food." Six or seven men took the four or five rifles, and they went to the village. Morning came and they returned with a couple of sleds of food.[679]

Jewish escapees from the ghetto in Iwie (Iwje), the Wilejka labour camp and the ghetto in Kuzeniec—many of whom succeeded in obtaining weapons before escaping—present similar stories.

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[678] Boris Kozinitz, "A Partisan's Story," in Shtokfish, *Book in Memory of Dokshitz-Parafianow,* Chapter 4.

[679] Account of Aida Brydbord (Chaja Czerczewska), in "Women of Valor: Partisans and Resistance Fighters," www.interlog.com/~mighty/valor/aida.htm, originally published in the *Journal of the Center for Holocaust Studies,* vol. 6, no. 4 (spring 1990). This brazen raid came to the attention of the Germans, who retaliated by attacking the Jews and killing twelve of them. "We were afraid to show our faces in any village," Brydbord recalled. Instead, they pillaged the supplies that the peasants had stored for the winter in straw and dirt-covered piles.

The armaments of the group consisted of a total of 6 rifles, three brought from the ghetto and three bought from peasants … The local population did not know the location of the hideout [in the Moryń forest]. Food was procured in the surrounding settlements with the force of weapons. A reserve of food stuffs was kept for the days when no one could go out of the bunker.[680]

We would enter a farm holding Sinas' rifle, and scare the farmers so we could take whatever we needed.

…

We lived in a commune. At night the men would go to collect food in the nearby villages.[681]

About 300 Jews including old women and babies escaped from the Kurenitz slaughter and were now in the Pushtza [puszcza, i.e., forest]. The men and the women walk to the neighboring villages and ask for bread, potatoes, flour or soup. A few of the men receive the food after they threatened to light the farms on fire. A few times when they refused they stole from the fields. They stole laundry that was hanging in the yard.

…

And here the Jews walk around. Everyday they must go to the villages begging, demanding and even threatening just to get a little bit of potatoes.

At the beginning the Belorussians were helpful. They would give them food, some from pity and others fearful of revenge. But when the "Jew sickness" continued, meaning they wanted food every day, they changed their attitude. From refusal to mocking, from put downs to physical fights.[682]

Generally, the Belarusian villagers in the surrounding areas were sympathetic to us. We received handouts, both from the ones that were behind us ideologically, and the ones that weren't. Some gave out of pity, others gave fearing that we would burn their homes. As time passed, we realized that asking for pity was not as effective as scaring the villagers. We took long pieces of wood and made them look like rifles and, in the dark of night, we went to the villages and threatened them with our "weapons." We also used rough voices and harsh language so that they would think we were Partisans.[683]

A group of armed Jews who escaped from the Słonim ghetto embarked on a similar course.

We found a Jewish officer, who had been in the regular army. His name was Jefim Fedorowitz. He took it upon himself to organise a Jewish combat group and to be its commander. Among the commanders of the divisions and platoons were Abe Doktorchik, Zenon Flint (who returned several

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[680] Account of Meyshe Kaganovitsh in Kaganovich, *In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ivye.*

[681] Account of Shimon Zimmerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac*.

[682] Account of Zalman Uri Gurevitz in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac*.

[683] Account of Yitzhak Zimerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

times to the ghetto to bring more Jews and weapons), Erich Stein … and Herzl (who was commander of a reconnaissance platoon).

I was happy. I had food, fresh air, weapons. In general, at this age, there is love for girls. We had a different love. We had love for weapons. … We saw how the villagers treated us with respect, and it was only because of our weapons. We also knew that, with weapons, we would be able to take revenge. …

We started to go on small assignments, ten to twelve men in one division. Our task was to produce food, weapons, ammunition, and clothes. We would go into a village. Some of us would stand guard, and the others would enter the houses. I was a machine gunner. I had an assistant, Lustig Mietek. Together we would stand at the entrances to the villages.[684]

Fugitives from the ghetto in Wiszniew tired of begging for food as soon as they acquired arms from a friendly peasant.

Just before we were getting ready to go to the forest, the old man, the father-in-law of one of the brothers, took out from a hiding place an old, old rifle from the days of Nikolai II. Also he took out a Nagan and three bullets. He gave it all to us as a gift and said, "Take it. You might need it, and with these you will be a little safer." This was a good beginning. Later on these weapons impressed everyone who met us on our way. We would knock on the doors of villagers in the middle of the night, and when they came down from the bed to open the door and saw the weapons in our hands, it would soften them and they would give us whatever we asked for: bread, clothes, and sometimes even weapons or information that we needed. …

During that night we knocked on the door of one of the wealthiest schlachtas [*szlachta*—a member of the petty nobility] in the Vishnevo [Wiszniew] puszcza [forest]. As soon as he opened the door and saw the rifle he became very generous and said, "I would give you the flour happily but the Germans were here and they took everything." So we ordered him to open his barns but they were empty. But while we looked there we saw a slaughtered pig that was already salted hanging in one of the corners of the barn. Since the schlachta begged us we left him with half of the pig, which he thanked us for.

After a long search we found flour in one of the storehouses and we ordered him to give us eight sacks of flour, which he would carry in a wagon to a place where we told him. … So this beginning encouraged us and told us how to conduct ourselves in this dark world we found ourselves in. We had one rule: we must not be scared. In the entire area of the Vishnevan puszcza all became acquainted with the Jewish partisans, and more than one shook from fear of our revenge. And this was really our aim. For this day of revenge we stayed alive.

… Added to the Jews from Oshmany [Oszmiana] there were some Jews who had escaped from Branowicz [Baranowicze]. So now, together with the Vishnevans were a unit of 50 people. The winter was coming and we had to take care of food and supplies for all of them. In different ways we were able to do this.

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[684] Shepetinski, *Jacob's Ladder,* 49–50. For descriptions of weapon gathering in the Słonim ghetto see Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 142, 146–48, 151–53, 198–201.

> … In one episode that we called the Boot Action, ten men, nine Jews amongst them including Kokin and me, and a Russian partisan by the name of Vanka, who belonged to the brigade of Tchaklov [Chkalov], …
>
> Meanwhile, morning came so we decided to continue to Vishnevo to take boots … I with the Russian partisan Vanka, went by the Vishnevan church … On the way we saw many farmers who came from the area by foot or by other transportation to the church as they always did. So we chose the best horse we saw and took him from a Christian and quickly rode to the church.
>
> When we arrived there and checked the people we realized that the ones we were looking for didn't arrive that day because they were fearful of the partisans. So we sat there waiting for the prayer to end. When it ended we stood at the entrance of the church with two guns in our hands, and everyone who had new boots on their feet was asked to go to the house of the organist where they were ordered to take off their boots. Since they were all fearful of our guns they happily let go of their boots. We collected ten pairs of new boots and rapidly left for the forest.[685]

Other accounts confirm that this *modus operandi* was widespread:

> Then they made a discovery that would change the course of their lives. They came upon Zahorski's sixteen-year-old son looking after the cows in the field, holding an empty machine gun he had found. They bartered a shirt for the gun.
>
> "Now we were kings," Zalman [Katz from Dzisna] remembers. …
>
> Zalman decided to rob a farmer. He burst into the farmer's house waving his empty machine gun, while Moishe stood at the door in view of the farmer's family. Zalman threatened to kill everyone, if they did not cooperate, pointing to Moishe by the door as one of twenty partisans waiting outside to burst in if the farmer gave them trouble. He demanded food and got it. The machine gun made a decisive difference in their lives. Now they possessed the power of life and death over others and the means to carry out their demands. What they needed were bullets.[686]

> He [Captain Bobkov, the Soviet commander] was now turning over four rifles and ammunition to the Jews so they could go into the villages for food. …
>
> The next morning, they examined the rifles. Two of them were useless. The same day, two groups, each armed with one rifle, went into the villages for food. They returned with two horse-drawn wagons loaded with sacks of potatoes and even some clothing. Tied to one of the wagons was a cow. Peasants too have more respect for Jews carrying weapons.[687]

Resorting to robbery was not, of course, the only way to survive in the forest. Some Jews—such as the following one from Zdzięcioł near Nowogródek, another from Wiszniew, and an additional one from Kurzeniec—survived, at least intially, by begging from the farmers.

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[685] Gdaliyau Dudman, "Vishnevo during the War," in Abramson, *Wiszniew, As It Was and Is No More,* 125 ff.

[686] Abram, *The Light After the Dark,* 16.

[687] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry* 350–51.

Because there was no man in our family my mother became the man. She was the sole breadwinner for our little family [which included the author, her mother and her grandmother—*M.P.*]. The way to find bread was to go to beg from the farmers. Each person took his life into his own hands. She would go out with the men. Each person would take on a particular farmer's house. If you were lucky, you got something. If you were unlucky, you could be chased away or killed. My mother kept on doing it until the end of the war, in the bitter cold, with her legs wrapped in rags. She was cracking the ice on the rivers to get through to the farmers to get something. … My mother saw to it that I should have food and did.[688]

Generally, the Belarusian [Belorussian] villagers in the surrounding areas were sympathetic to us. We received handouts, both from the ones that were behind us ideologically, and the ones that weren't. Some gave out of pity, others gave fearing that we would burn their homes. As time passed, we realized that asking for pity was not as effective as scaring the villagers. We took long pieces of wood and made them look like rifles and, in the dark of night, we went to the villages and threatened them with our "weapons." We also used rough voices and harsh language so that they would think we were Partisans.[689]

Hungry, not knowing our way around, we asked to join some of the groups who knew how to reach villages where we could beg for food. They refused, telling us that if too many people were begging around, the farmers would stop giving food.

Musio and I had no choice but to strike out on our own. … At night Musio and I took empty sacks and went in the general direction of the villages. We followed paths and cart tracks for several hours until we reached our first village. We lay down for a few minutes to listen for sounds of danger, then went from house to house, softly knocking on windows and begging, "Kind housewife, please give us something to eat. We are hungry."

Many of them handed us some potatoes or slices of bread, a bit of salt and even an occasional egg. After several hours, with our sacks full, we retraced our steps and were back in the camp before dawn. It was such a relief to sit by the fire, roast our potatoes and eat our fill. We shared our food with the Kuppers.

Rivka Gvint and her mother also joined our camp. They were in much the same predicament as us. Nobody wanted to include them in their forays, so we offered to take Rivka with us on our next nightly expedition. She came with Musio and me, filled her sack with food, and we set off back to camp. …

We continued our nightly routine, which was becoming more difficult and dangerous. The peasants nearby were beginning to resent our presence and demands, and that forced us to venture out to distant villages. …

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[688] Account of Evelyn Kahn in "Women of Valor: Partisans and Resistance Fighters," www.interlog.com/~mighty/valor/evelyn.htm, originally published in the *Journal of the Center for Holocaust Studies,* vol. 6, no. 4 (Spring 1990).

[689] Shlomo Rogovin, "Vishnevo Stories," posted on the Internet at: <http://www.eilatgordinlevitan.com/volozhin/vol_pages/vol_stories_shlomo.html>.

> Normally, one night of begging would keep us supplied with food for two days. But the villagers were getting tired of us, and their offerings began to decrease. We decided to move further away from the puszcza [forest] and look for a new place …[690]

A teenage boy managed to stay alive in the forest by begging for food: "At night, he would go to the gentiles and ask for bread to bring to his family."[691]

However, most fugitives from the ghetto, especially young men with weapons, were by and large not content to rely on the vagaries and humiliation of having to beg for food. Having been brutalized by their experiences in the ghetto and driven by revenge, almost invariably they resorted to robbery and violence from the outset. Overnight they managed to turn the villagers into their enemies. Some Jews escaped from ghettos with arms. Others obtained weapons from or with the help of the local population, including the Polish underground, in amicable ways.[692] However, just like the Soviet partisans, many Jews resorted to violent methods to obtain food and arms,[693] which did not endear them to the local population and, understandably, provoked retaliation. It is important to note that the conflict generally unfolded in this sequence: violence on the part of the partisans, followed by defensive acts on the part of robbed farmers. Even peasants who were previously friendly or neutral started to turn against Jewish forest "visitors."

Yechiel Silber, who eventually joined up with the Bielski group in Naliboki forest, described how his group of armed fugitives from the Stołpce ghetto immediately robbed isolated farms, thereby provoking desperate acts of self-defence on the part of the farmers who tried to fend off the attacks or turned to the local authorities for assistance. Those who lost out were not the assailants, but the farmers whom some would like to categorize as "collaborators," which they surely weren't.

> We were still new to the forest. We noticed a small house from afar, and we decided that three people would go there to take food. The others would remain at the border of the forest to guard the three. Along the way we shot a few times into the air in order to scare the peasant who lived in the little house. When he saw the three, he indeed gave them a loaf of bread, and he told them to come again the next morning to get a fresh loaf of bread. In the morning they set out again to the little house. As they approached, he opened fire upon them. They threw themselves upon the ground and

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[690] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 100–101, 103.

[691] Account of Ze'ev Lerman (pseudonym) in Dan Bar-On, *Fear and Hope: Three Generations of the Holocaust* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 102.

[692] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 60, 87, 97, 105, 106, 123, 129, 147.

[693] Soviet archival documents make it clear that this was a generally accepted practice among Soviet partisans. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Belorussia on July 24, 1943, attended by Ponomarenko, instructions were issued to shoot, execute, hang or burn alive any civilian who stood in the way of partisan provision gathering. The document in question is reproduced in Zdzisław Julian Winnicki, *Szkice polsko-białoruskie* (Wrocław: Gajt, 1998), 51–52 (fond 4, opis 33a, delo 254, Documents of the Belorussian Partisan Headquarters, in the National Archives of the Republic of Belarus in Minsk).

began to retreat. At night, we all gathered at the designated point and decided to take revenge upon the peasant. Some of us went to set the house on fire. …

We had to move on from there and settle in the region of Humniska, where there were White Russians. We immediately began to dig pits and make dwellings, because winter was arriving. We dug three large pits: two for people and one for all other things. When we finished, we decided to collect food for a few months. We spread out far from our point, so as not to give any hints as to where we lived. Along the way, we took a horse and wagon from a farmer, and took as much food as we were able to. In the meantime, the farmer alerted the Germans about the situation. The Germans spread out along a certain way in order to capture us, but we avoided them by not following the straight path, but rather going by side fields. We hid the food very well, and sent the horse and wagon free far from the forest. That same night, we heard terrible shooting. The next morning, we came upon a nearby farmer and asked him about the shooting that night. We found out that a German patrol came upon the empty wagon that we had set free. They switched routes and went along the route where the second patrol was waiting for us at a certain place. They recognized the horse, and not knowing that Germans were sitting upon that wagon, they opened fire, being sure that they were shooting at us. The Germans sitting in the wagon themselves thought that partisans were shooting at them, so they shot back. 45 [sic—undoubtedly a grossly exaggerated figure—*M.P.*] Germans from both sides fell. At the end, they shot the farmer, for they suspected that he was involved in this situation.[694]

After leaving the Wilno ghetto to join the Soviet partisans, Litman Mor (then Muravchik or Murawczyk) described the seven-day trek about twenty fugitives led by Shaike (Shura or Alexander) Bogen made to Narocz forest. They did not hesitate to extract food and services from local peasants by force. This made them feel like true partisans.

We continued wandering in the dark … Suddenly, we saw at a distance the light of a kerosene lamp flickering in the window of an isolated house. … In the house, we found a couple of peasants and a baby, who stood on the table. I held the pistol in my hand and threatened with it the house owners. The woman got scared and so was the baby who started to cry. The woman begged for her life. The man kept silent, maybe out of his being scared, or just because being silent is less dangerous than talking. His wife said that he was dumb, but we couldn't know for sure. … Bogen explained to the woman that we are looking for our friends, and described the place where we left the group. We took the woman and the dumb peasant along with us, seemingly to avoid that after all he would run and turn us in. I will not forget the baby we left alone at home, crying bitterly.

Probably, I used the pistol in an irrational way, but the fact that I pulled it out, turned me, at that situation, into a "partisan". This changed my feeling significantly. …

Before leaving the peasant house, we equipped ourselves with food and milk for the entire group, as partisans use [sic] to do in the forests and followed the peasant and his wife, until we found our group. …

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[694] Yechiel Silber, "The Partisans of Sochaczew," in Sztejn (Shtayn, Stein) and Wejszman (Vaysman, Weissman), *Pinkas Sokhatshev,* 514 ff.

> We had no military uniforms. Our clothing we took from the villagers …[695]

Jakub Szafran, who joined a group of Jewish fugitives in Narocz forest after escaping from a work camp in Wilejka, and afterwards joined a Jewish unit of the Soviet partisans, stated repeatedly that they took food from villagers by force.[696]

Shalom Yoran, a member of the Markov Brigade stationed in Narocz forest, described the tactics his forest group embraced to requisition food from the local population and the inevitable conflict that ensued:

> There were isolated farmhouses set in clearings in the forests or in the fields near the woods. These farmhouses—"hutors"—were very simple, primitive huts built of logs. …
>
> When we chanced upon a hutor we entered and asked for food. The farmers would usually give us some, and we noticed fear in their faces. We realized that these farmers were afraid of the "people of the night," which is what they called the unidentified folks who scavenged for food among them in the darkest hours. They did not report us to the Germans, or refuse food, not knowing what the repercussions would be. …
>
> We had no qualms about stealing the tools we needed for building ourselves a zemlianka. From farmyards we took axes, hammers, shovels, saws, and buckets for carrying water and for cooking. …
>
> Several nights a week we did the rounds of the villages, acquiring provisions. We must have been the only ones in that area roaming by night to beg and steal food. They did not know who we were and we felt that they were afraid of us. … Though the villagers were more generous than in the puszcza area, we realized that we could not get all that we needed for the winter just by begging. We needed other tactics.
>
> We made a master plan of the provisions we would need to enable us to survive underground for up to six months. … We had to have a big supply of food to sustain five hearty young men throughout the long winter …
>
> Our first step was to start stealing potatoes from the cellars in the yards of the farmhouses. … We each carried a sack on our backs … to the zemlianka. …
>
> Shaping a piece of wood to look like a Soviet Nagan revolver, which had a wooden hand grip, I stuffed it into the holster. It looked like an authentic revolver when I attached it to my belt. We then shared our plan with the others. We would no longer beg for food. We would demand it!
>
> At first they were hesitant … finally we all decided to give it a try. I would enter a farmhouse alone, and they would wait outside. … with my Nagan holster fully exposed.

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[695] Mor, *The War For Life,* chapter 11. In an earlier testimony, Mor (Murawczyk) describes how only armed Jews were accepted into the Voroshilov Brigade, and those who were unarmed were rejected. Afterwards, those Jews who had only handguns had them confiscated and were forced to leave the brigade. Only those who managed to acquire rifles were allowed back. See Roszkowski, *Żydzi w walce 1939–1945,* vol. 3, 189–90; Testimony of Litman Murawczyk, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/3755.

[696] Testimony of Jakub Szafran, Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute (Warsaw), no. 301/2829. Szafran states that, initially, Soviet partisans refused to accept unarmed Jews and does not mention any interaction with Polish partisans.

> At the first village I knocked on the door and demanded in Russian to be let in. … I demanded certain basic foods from the farmer—potatoes, flour, peas, lard, and salt—and specified the quantities. He did not try to chase me away, but began to bargain about the quantities. …
>
> After this initial success, we all agreed that the tactic could bring in enough food to last the winter. …
>
> Shimon, Musio, and Jeijze remained outside, each one carrying sticks made to look like rifles. … I developed a form of taxation. I would ask each farmer about the size of his land, the number of livestock and members of his family, and would tax them accordingly. They would argue and we would invariably reach a compromise. When we could no longer carry such quantities of food on our backs, we began to add a horse and cart to our demands. …
>
> We confiscated a black iron stove from one farmer. … Every night we made a new list of our needs and tried to amass provisions accordingly. …
>
> Suddenly shadows emerged from behind the treee and a large group of peasants flailing sticks and sickles came running toward us, shouting, "Kill them!" Kill them!" [All five members of the group survived this encounter and settled in for the winter supplied with sacks of peas, flour and other grain, a massive pile of potatoes, and meat (pork, lamb and fat).] …
>
> Our official missions usually were to gather information regarding German positions and strength in the area. For that we needed to be in touch with our liaisons located around the German garrisons. We would take horses with carts, driven by their peasant owners, and go from village to village. We would promise to reward our liaisons generously for important information, and for their loyalty. Occasionally, we would give them cows and pigs, which of course we would get [i.e., steal] from other farmers. … we managed to get such luxuries as sausages, bread, butter, boots, clothes, pigs, cows. Taking these opportunities to acquire food, we would sometimes get carried away by greed, and would lose track of our priorities.
>
> One night we loaded six carts. We presented one cart and the livestock to our liaison. Then, with each of us sitting atop a loaded cart, holding the reins with one hnad and a rifle with the other, we headed back toward our base. I was in the first cart, wearing a newly acquired shepskin coat.[697]

In his memoirs, Leon Kahn describes the efforts of a family group in the Nacza forest to increase the number of the group's guns by taking some from farmers in the area. The farmers were reluctant to part with their guns as they had been in their families for years and were used for hunting. On discovering that a certain farmer had a gun, the Jews would send a posse to confiscate the weapon. A refusal to hand over a gun met with threats and, "when all else failed, we would beat him and threaten the lives of his wife and children." On one occasion a farmer was beaten half to death, but he still refused to give up his gun. The Jews dragged his children out of the house, one by one behind the barn, slapped them to make them scream, shot a rifle into the air to feign an execution, and then clapped a hand over their screaming mouths. When the man remained unconvinced and refused to surrender his gun, they dragged his wife from the

[697] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 104–105, 106, 107–109, 111–12, 162.

house.[698] Such occurrences were not infrequent as the following accounts show:

> We learned that there were many weapons in a certain village. We arrived there one winter night, surrounded it, and started checking the homes of Polish farmers who were members of the AK [Armia Krajowa]. I entered one of their houses, where I [Alexander or Shura Katzenbogen, later Bogen] knew such a person lived. Avraham Rein, Hirsch Charmatz, and Litman Murawczyk [Muravchik] came with me. While we talked to the farmer and his two sons, Murawczyk hit his rifle on the floor and a bullet flew out, hitting the ceiling. The farmer became very scared and immediately said that a neighbor across the street from him had a cellar where he hid many rifles.
>
> When we came to the neighbor and asked for the rifles, he denied having them; and in spite of the fact that we beat him badly, he refused to confess. So I ordered him to go outside and staged a mock trial with him. I said he was to receive a death penalty because he refused to give weapons for the Resistance. I made him dig a hole to be buried in; and as he worked, I occasionally said, "You can still save your life if you tell us where the weapons are." The air was filled with tension and nervousness. I could not break this man.
>
> We had no choice but to place him standing in the hole with a shovel in his hand and half of his body protruding. Meanwhile, the farmer's wife, who did not know her husband's fate, told the other guys where the weapons were hidden and we found rifles and ammunition there. We confiscated six sleighs and horses and left.[699]

> We asked for weapons at every house. The farmers usually denied having any. Suvorov [the leader of a *spetsgruppa*, i.e., a group charged with carrying out a special assignment] would then demand to know which other farmers had weapons and where they were concealed. If he was not told, he threatened to confiscate everything the farmer had. It usually worked. We would then be given names, but rarely told where the weapons were hidden.
>
> We would then go to the mentioned peasants and demand their arms. Suvorov would shed his charming ways and turn into a roaring beast. He threatened to shoot them, to burn them, to take away their possessions, if they didn't hand over their weapons at once. If they still denied having any, he went to extremes. He would grab the peasant by the ear and as though aiming at his head, would shoot a bullet through his earlobe. When the poor man recovered from the shock and discovered that he was still alive, Suvorov would apologize that he had missed his mark and promised to do better with the next shot if the farmer didn't comply with his demand. By that time the peasant was usually ready to give up all his firearms.

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[698] Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 85. Kahn remarked that his father and many Jews of the older generation did not support all this violent activity. "Leibke," his father told him, "these farmers who you're taking food from are my friends! I've known them all my life, I've eaten with them, done business with them! How could I hold a gun to their heads?" Ibid., 86. The Jewish forest group was led by a tailor named Elke who was executed by a party of Soviet partisans (which included two Jews) after continued bickering over food raids by the family group. The Soviets then confiscated all the weapons collected by the group and warned them not to raid the villages for food anymore. The group elected a new leader after Elke's death, a man called Paisha, who was formerly part of the Grodno underworld. Ibid., 89–90.

[699] Alexander (Shura) Bogen, originally Katzenbogen, "The Onset of the Partisan Units in the Forest of Naroch," in Moshe Kalcheim, ed., *With Proud Bearing, 1939–1945: Chapters in the History of Jewish Fighting in the Naroch Forests* (Tel Aviv: Organization of Partisans, Underground Fighters, and Ghetto Rebels in Israel, 1991), Internet: <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Svencionys/naroch_partisans.html>.

In one case, all of us were sure the peasant was hiding his weapons, but none of our tactics worked. Calmly and stubbornly the farmer said, "Go ahead, kill me. I have no weapons to give you." Suvorov and another partisan led the man outside and ordered him to dig his own grave. We were told to keep his wife and children at the window to watch.

Suvorov positioned the peasant to face the grave and shot. The peasant fell in. Suvorov then called, "Bring out the woman, it's her turn now."

With that the woman broke down. She tearfully pleaded for her life and said she knew where the weapons were hidden. … From the window the wife couldn't have seen that Suvorov had shot between the farmer's legs and pushed him into the grave.

Another time, a supporter of the partisans pointed out the house of a peasant who had been seen at an adjacent town entering the German police station on his way to the market. The suspicion that the peasant was a spy was strengthened by the fact that he attended church, which was against the Soviet government's principles. He had to be working for the Germans.

Going toward that peasant's house, Suvorov turned to me and said, "I am sure he is a spy. Let's kill him." …

We went into the house and ordered the peasant to remove his pants and to lie on the table. Then with a long metal rifle cleaner Suvorov began to whip the man's behind. …

The farmer at last admitted that he had gone to the police station to request a permit to visit a relative in another village. He swore that he was not a spy and that he had not given the Germans any information. He sounded convincing. Suvorov gave him another twenty lashes to make sure he would remember never to go to the police station again or else he would be shot.

During the time I was part of the specgruppa [*spetsgruppa*] we managed to accumulate quite a substantial cache of weapons.[700]

Abba [Kovner] told the family [in the village of Drogozha, actually Draguże] that he was a Jewish partisan. … Looking at the father of the family, Abba said, "We have come for your weapons."

The old man said there were no weapons.

Abba cocked his gun. "Hand them over."

The woman sobbed. "Someone has tricked you," said the man. "There are no weapons."

[The partisans then found a rifle in the barn.]

Abba told one of his soldiers to take the father outside. The mother asked Abba what he wanted with the old man. "Give us the guns," said Abba, "or we will shoot him." She told Abba that there were no more guns; he now had everything. Abba called out the order to kill the old man. A single shot came from the fields. Abba told his men to bring one of the sons outside.

"Where are the guns?"

"You have the guns," said the woman.

Grabbing the woman by the arm, Abba dragged her across the yard into the barn, where a broken-down old horse was tied up.

"Saddle the horse," said Abba. "We will take the horse."

The woman said she would not survive the winter without the horse.

"Saddle the horse."

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[700] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 133–35.

> With slumped shoulder, the woman led Abba back to the house and up to the attic, removed a false door and handed him rifles, pistols and a machine gun [sic]. The father and his son were then brought back inside; the partisans had fired their guns in the air.[701]

Harrowing as these memoirs are, they still do not capture some of the more horrific and bloody episodes that ensued. As Jewish sources concede, on occasion the information obtained from intimidated farmers was false and the partisans demanded guns from people who did not have any.[702] What the fate of those farmers wrongly suspected of having arms is not elaborated on, but it is not difficult to surmise in view of the following report. On September 18, 1943, a group of 15 Soviet partisans staged an assault on a farm near Rudziszki belonging to Edward Wawrzewski. They came looking for weapons and inquired about a co-owner of the farm, a captain of the Polish army, who was away. After interrogating Wawrzewski under torture and carrying out a search that turned up no arms, they riddled his wife and his mother as well a retired Polish officer by the name of Kosobudzki with bullets and, after blocking the door, set the house and farm buildings on fire. Wawrzewski, who was shot only once and feigned death, managed to escape from the inferno through a window. The band was led by a Soviet soldier named Seriozha, who had been sheltered by a Polish family after the Soviet rout in June 1941.[703]

Relations between the villagers and the Jews varied from place to place. A lot depended on the attitude of the local population, but more on the behaviour of the partisans themselves and the harsh punishment the Germans meted out to those suspected of aiding the partisans. Where the partisans refrained from pillaging and violence as a *modus operandi*, the local population was more willing to help, albeit the supply of food and other provisions was less regular and abundant.[704] Some Jewish memoirs maintain the pretence that among the rural population there were clearly delineated zones which naturally gravitated toward the Soviet or Polish partisans, or even the Germans, and that this in turn dictated the behaviour of the partisans. Apart from the relatively small number of "defensive villages" (*Wehrdörfer*) and "auxiliary police villages" (*Schutzmannschaft-, Ordnungsdienstdörfer*), which were established by the Germans as strongholds for the

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[701] Cohen, *The Avengers,* 117–18.

[702] Tec, *Defiance,* 103: "From time to time peasants would tell about each other's possession of arms. The Jewish partisans would follow these leads and make the owners give up their treasures. Occasionally the information was false and the partisans demanded guns from people who did not have them."

[703] Chodakiewicz, *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne,* 83–84.

[704] See, for example, the conditions for a Communist People's Guard unit, to which a number of Jews were attached, operating in the vicinity of Piotrów in the Świętokrzyskie Mountains in central Poland. The armed Jewish partisans were instructed not to take anything by force from the "neighbouring" villagers; in exchange, many villagers came to their assistance. See Eugeniusz Fąfara, *Gehenna ludności żydowskiej* (Warsaw: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1983), 352–53. On the other hand, according to non-Communist sources, a Jewish band led by Józef Lepiarz from that same unit was feared by the local population whom they robbed and raped mercilessly. See Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, *W walce o Wielką Polskę: Propaganda zaplecza politycznego Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych (1939–1945)* (Biała Podlaska: Rekonkwista, and Warsaw: Rachocki i S-ka, 2000), 323. The two accounts are not necessarily inconsistent since the instructions not to take anything by force may well have pertained only to the immediate area of the partisan base (i.e., "neighbouring" villages). See also Chodakiewicz, *Żydzi i Polacy 1918–1955,* 333–34.

purpose of pacifying the countryside and procuring agricultural products,[705] this dichotomy has little basis in fact. According to Jewish sources:

> Our areas of operation were divided geographically. … The whole territory was divided into three spheres of influence—Red, Gray, and Black. In the Red territory, which we controlled, we moved around at will, day and night. No Germans (except for very large forces) dared to come into this territory. …
>
> In the Gray territory we were free to move at night in small or large groups … The Germans used some of the main roads in the Gray territory during the day. … In 1942–43 we had considered it enemy territory, where we could find shoes, boots, furs, coats, clothing, horses, sheep, cows, pigs and other supplies.
>
> We did not confiscate any food in the Red territory for two reasons. First of all there was not much left to be taken, and secondly, we considered the local population as semi-friendly. We had liquidated all our real enemies and the Germans had killed our real friends. In the Gray territory, however, we confiscated at will.
>
> The Black territory was where the Germans considered themselves safe, day and night. It consisted mostly of garrisons surrounded by bunkers, trenches, barbed wire, and stone reinforced buildings. …
>
> The following evening we came to some large villages outside the forest. We were ordered to confiscate horses and wagons, cows, flour, grain and any other food supplies. The wagons were loaded with food and the cows distributed among the partisans, two men to a cow.[706]

> We tried hard to make this food collecting less painful for the peasants, especially to those that were supporting us. We were not allowed to take provisions from villages next to our camp. The order was to go to farmers who lived far from us and close to the German garrisons. Usually, those who lived near to the Germans were also pro-Nazi and, therefore, we were allowed to confiscate their food. … When we came to a village we would go in and help ourselves to whatever we wanted.[707]

Yitzhak Arad, an Israeli historian who served as a partisan in Markov's Voroshilov Brigade, also supports the dogmatic view that villages were "naturally" either friendly to the Soviet partisans or allegedly "collaborated" with the Germans. Of course, it was the incessant plundering by Soviet (and Jewish) partisans that led to the villagers' hostility, and not vice versa.

> The partisans took foodstuffs, animals and clothing at gunpoint, searching for them if they thought they had been hidden. … Often they ordered the farmers to hitch their horses to wagons and,

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[705] Rein, *The Kings and the Pawns,* 297–300.

[706] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 157–58, 189.

[707] Testimony of Jacob Greenstein, in Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 193, 194.

> accompanied by partisans, bring what they had taken to the forests. … These actions for foodstuff were called by the partisans "economic missions."
>
> Insofar as was possible, the partisans tried not to take provisions from friendly villages, but rather from those that had collaborated with the Germans. As time passed, nothing was left to take from the villages close to the perimeters of the partisan-controlled areas, and they were forced to go further afield, sometimes dozens of kilometers away. They usually went out at night … When the partisans reached a village, they would post guards on its outskirts and conduct searches inside the houses, barns and stables, looking for caches of hidden food. Such 'economic missions' could take many hour. The Germans had collaborators among the peasants who, if the partisans arrived, were to run or ride to the closest police station or military post to report. The partisans often had to fight their way out of ambushes or flee from pursuers while still in the village or on their way back to the forest.
>
> As the numbers of partisans grew they needed more food, but the sources of supply dwindled, not only as a result of the "economic missions" but also because of German activity: the Germans confiscated food but also burned villages near the forests in retaliation for partisan attacks, or for collaboration with the partisans or failure to provide information about them. Villages or peasants suspected of collaborating with the Germans could expect similar retaliation from the partisans. … Under such conditions, "economic missions" became military operations accompanied by battles, and larger partisan forces were needed to cope with the dangers of the road.[708]

While conscious of the fact that the villagers found themselves squeezed between the demands of the Soviet partisans and those of the Germans, Arad fails to appreciate how brutal the "economic missions" were and their impact on the villagers' attitude toward the Soviet partisans. Rather he argues that it was fair game to use the civilian population instrumentally for the "Great Patriotic War" effort:

> It was a war of survival for the Soviet Union, and one of its aspects was the warfare waged by the partisans—a total, uncompromising war in which the civilian population paid a heavy price, both in the occupied territories and behind Soviet lines. The "economic missions" invoving confiscation of food and clothing were necessary conditions for partisan fighting.[709]

Another member of Markov's Voroshilov Brigade sees matters in a more nuanced way. Shalom Yoran, comments on this matter in the context of his duties as a guide for a Soviet "specgruppa" (*spetsgruppa*), led by Suvorov, and as a member of the short-lived Jewish "Revenge" (*Mest*) detachment.

> The accepted, though not popular, means of acquiring provisions from the peasants and villagers was called "zagotovka." Though sometimes simply requesting food was enough, often more forceful coercion was required. We would go from house to house getting potatoes, bread, butter, and lard. … On the first night, overwhelmed by the abundance of food, I swallowed over twenty raw eggs. …

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[708] Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 178–79.

[709] Ibid., 180.

> Our system of zagotovka quickly became more sophisticated. When we entered a village, two partisans guarded at both ends. The rest of us, in groups of four, would go from door to door. …
>
> We would start the evening with a good meal by first trying to find a well-to-do farmhouse and asking for food. Not wishing to make threats, Suvorov would ask politely. When it was served, he would ask for vodka. If he was not satisfied with what we got, he would take out his grenade and place it on the table. … The poor woman, expecting the "bomb" to go off at any moment, would rush to bring us anything we wished for. …
>
> One of the first and essential missions of each otriad was to acquire provisions. … Only three out of every group of ten going on a zagotovka had arms, both to fight off the Germans if necessary, and to scare the peasants if they did not cooperate with us.
>
> The villagers closer to our woods were supportive of the partisans, though not necessarily by choice. Each otriad was allocated a specific area, and could only get food in villages within those limits. In our designated area we would approach the village leader with a list of the supplies we needed. It was up to him to decide how much each villager was to give, and he accompanied us on our rounds. We then requisitioned carts and horses, loaded our supplies, and the owners of the carts drove us back to the edge of the woods. The peasants had to wait there while we took the wagons to our camp to unload, because the sites of the bases had to be kept secret. The all the carts and horses were tied together and returned to their owners.
>
> Further away, nearer to the German garrisons, the population was more loyal to the Germans, also not necessarily by choice. There, because it was not considered under partisan jurisdiction and not bound by any self-imposed partisan restrictions, any otriad was free to go on a zagotovka. Thus, in the villages near the German garrisons our pattern was different. A scouting patrol had to check that the area was clear of Germans and local police, then leave a small group on guard at both ends of the village. Most of the villages were built along one main road. Two groups, one starting at each end, went from house to house collecting food, clothes, and occasional livestock. The peasants protested, argued, pleaded, but were afraid to resist. …
>
> We had our contacts and informers in every village … They were the first ones we approached when we arrived at night.[710]

Tuvia Bielski, whose members were threatened with annihilation by the Soviet partisan commanders for robbing the peasants,[711] appears to concur with this more nuanced viewpoint.

> Although I was very careful about preventing outright robbery, it would be quite difficult to pinpoint the line which divided that requisitioning which sustained our lives, and outright robbery. …

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[710] Yoran, *The Defiant,* 133–34, 139–40.

[711] Tec, *Defiance,* 74; Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 352–53.

> Of course, the Partisan's conception of the difference between appropriating and robbing was not the same as that of the farmer … And the concept of the one who gives the order is not the same as that of the one who obeys it.[712]

Tuvia Bielski's stance is not surprising, given the nature of his own initiation and the key role "economic operations" came to play in the day-to-day lives of his group. After joining the Soviet partisans, Bielski and the local Soviet commander reached an agreement to divide up the territory where each side could forage.[713]

As the size of the forest group grew, it became more and more cumbersome to rely on traditional methods such as begging, working, and bartering for food. The generosity of the local population was also wearing thin as the demands for provisions kept growing from all sides. The fear of severe punishment that inevitably followed when the Germans suspected villagers of assisting the partisans also came to bear on the increasingly pauperized peasantry. Yet, the robberies continued unabated, with the farmers being stripped of anything and everything. It was to be expected that they would resent such treatment and that some would take measures to protect themselves and their property. The conflict with the peasants was thus inevitable, and was not of their making. As the intensity of the hostility directed toward the peasants mounted, the Jewish partisans' deep-seated contempt for *goys* would come to the surface. Those who openly resented being robbed were branded as "trouble-makers," "fascists" or just plain "anti-Semites."

> But Asael's group had to eat. And so, at night, a few of them would venture into a farm house, where, guns in hand, they asked for food. Those who had no weapons carried sticks in the shape of shotguns on their shoulders. Owners of these artificial "guns" stayed outside the hut but close to the windows. The idea was to make the peasants think there were many of them and that they were well armed.[714]

> By this time Asael's group grew to fourteen … This enlarged group followed the established pattern. Under the cover of darkness a few men would venture into the village for food. Intimidated by the guns, the peasants would hand over whatever provisions they had.[715]

> Still, the resistance [within the group] to Tuvia's ideas about the enlargement of the otriad … they felt that one could not find enough food for so many people. Tuvia Bielski would not let himself be

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[712] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 352. Also cited, though somewhat rephrased, in Tec, *Defiance,* 73.

[713] Tec, *Defiance,* 75; Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 354.

[714] Tec, *Defiance,* 37.

[715] Ibid., 39.

influenced by their concerns … "Why do you worry so much about food. Let the peasants worry. We will get what we need from peasants and let more Jews come."[716]

At any time not more than twenty percent of the Bielski people could participate in food expeditions. ... Because of great distances, each group tried to collect as many provisions as possible at one time. Larger quantities of food required more people. Sometimes a food mission included as many as twenty-five men.

… a food mission headed by Asael [Bielski] returned to the Nalibocka base. With fifteen cows, many horses, and wagons filled with all kinds of provisions, this journey had been a success.[717]

[Shmuel Geller:] "Once I got a rifle, I was sent for food expeditions. First, I did not know how to do it. Therefore, they would have me stand guard while they were collecting food from the peasants. Later on I joined the others. During one of those expeditions I saw a woman's fur coat. My wife could use such a warm coat. I turned to the Polish peasant, 'Will you allow me?' For an answer the Pole cursed me and took away the coat.

"Next to me stood a butcher from Nowogródek. He swore at the peasant, promising him a beating.

"The butcher looked at me with anger and said, 'You miserable intellectual, you don't ask permission from the peasant! Did they ask permission when they were robbing Jews?' … The warm fur coat was soon on the butcher's wife. … Eventually I learned not to ask for permission."[718]

As proof of his intentions, he [Boris Rubizhewski] presented her [Sulia Wolozhinski] with a fur coat confiscated during one of his missions. … Sulia notes that … "Right away I was dressed. Right away, I got a pair of boots. I had a fur."[719]

Białobroda used his gun for robbing natives of their valuables, gold, and jewelry.[720]

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[716] Ibid., 46.

[717] Ibid., 110, 115.

[718] Ibid., 142–43.

[719] Ibid., 161.

[720] Ibid., 178. According to historian Yitzhak Arad, Białobroda was accused of informing the German police about Jews who smuggled food into the Lida ghetto and continued his criminal behaviour in the forest. He was sentenced to death by Tuvia Bielski and executed. See Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 298.

> He [Israel Kesler] was well suited to life in the forest and because of his past [as a professional thief] it was particularly easy for him to confiscate goods. He had a sense for guessing which peasants had hidden jewelry and gold.[721]

> The camp had many musicians but no instruments. Those who went on food expeditions were alerted to this need and, as a result, the Bielski otriad acquired a guitar, a violin, and a mandolin.[722]

> … the [Bielski] brothers sought to create the impression that they were a large and ruthless collection of fighters, the kind of men who would deal harshly with anyone who denied them supplies or informed to the authorities. Asael and Zus already had a reputation for roughness, but the three wanted the Bielski name to strike terror in the hearts of villagers. It was the only way they felt they could survive.
>
> They accomplished this by sending those without guns on missions equipped with long sticks, which in the dim moonlight looked like rifles. They wore ammunition belts bulging with already used bullets. They sang rousing martial songs at the top of their lungs in Russian while circling repeatedly through a village. Zus, the most confrontational brother, resorted to more explicit threats. On several occasions, he took a peasant's son from his home, led him out of sight, and fired a shot into the air. Then he returned to the house and announced to the farmer and his family, "We've killed the son. Now let's kill another." The grief-stricken man invariably offered weapons or food. …
>
> [His Belorussian friend Konstantin (Kostik) Kozlovsky] then described the stories he had been hearing about the Bielski brothers. "It is said that you are robbing people," he said. "And that your sister Taibe Dziencielski and the women are taking part in it."[723]

> A major priority of the camp remained the dangerous task of retrieving food. The young fighters, who were only able to work under cover of darkness, sometimes spent several nights on the road attempting to complete their tasks. It was a messy job that required a willingness to be brutal, a willingness to threaten the life of a peasant who resisted giving up food.
>
> The [Bielski] brothers knew that their success required a willingness to back up threats with the possibility of real violence. … The peasants had to understand that their lives were in jeopardy if they informed on the Jews in the forest.[724]

It would be remiss to ignore that violent forays such as these not only set the tone for relations with the local population, but also provoked the inevitable response on the part of some of the bolder farmers who

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[721] Tec, *Defiance,* 179. Israel Kesler or Kessler organized a petition against Tuvia Bielski and complained to Chernyshev that Bielski was holding gold and jewelry that should have been turned over to the partisan headquarters. He was executed by Bielski, after a trial, charged with trying to undermine Bielski (attempted rebellion). See Arad, *In the Shadow of the Red Banner,* 298–99.

[722] Tec, *Defiance,* 193.

[723] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 78–80.

[724] Ibid., 134.

were subjected to repeated, and ever more brazen, pillaging. Initially, small groups of assailants would simply be foiled or disarmed and sent on their way.[725] Later, some armed villagers defended their property by shooting at armed marauders. Others reported them to the local authorities, as they were required to do, or sometimes captured the robbers and handed them over. The local authorities, when they chose to intervene, were much more effective in controlling the problem of banditry, but this occurred infrequently, as the success of the Bielski group's operations show.

> One day, a few fellows [from the Bielski group] went to a far-off village to get some food. They took a cow, killed it and didn't wrap it tightly enough around the carcass. Dragging on the sled, the cow dripped blood all the way to Zabielovo [Zabiełowo] … I heard shooting. … With the first shots we had to retreat; we were no match for a well-organized police company.[726]

Dov Cohen (then Berl Kagan), another partisan from the Bielski group recalled the harsh conditions of survival for all involved.

> The problem of providing sufficient supplies for a camp of over 1,200 Jews was also complicated. Fewer and fewer provisions could be found in the villages: the partisans would often come and take what they needed in the way of clothing, footwear and food, and the German authorities also imposed ever-growing taxes. Villages suspected of helping the partisans were burned down, and their inhabitants killed. It wasn't easy, confiscating a farmer's last bit of property—his one remaining cow, horse or pig, or the stock of flour he had prepared. Sometimes they resisted violently, forcing us to retaliate in kind.[727]

Yet that same partisan's cousin and colleague, Jack (Idel) Kagan, shrugged off the predicament of the peasants quite aptly: "There was no room for mercy."[728]

In reality, however, the dichotomy between friendly (pro-Soviet) and hostile (pro-Nazi) villages, pushed in many holocaust memoirs, is largely fictitious. The "friendly" villages were generally those near the partisan base which, for strategic reasons, were treated more humanely. Their residents were granted immunity from being pilfered in order to establish a foothold in the area. Some villagers in turn played into this to safeguard their property and to avoid conflict with a formidable foe and were rewarded by the

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[725] A Soviet field report from November 10, 1942, for example, refers to a Jewish provision-gathering group that went to the western bank of the Niemen; they were disarmed, the confiscated weapons were given to the peasants, and they were administered a beating. The report does not clarify whether this was done by Belorussian peasants or by Russian partisans (perhaps both), but their accompanying remarks ("Without Jews we will save Russia") make it clear they weren't Poles.

[726] Rubin, *Against the Tide,* 115.

[727] Kagan and Cohen, *Surviving the Holocaust with the Russian Jewish Partisans,* 66.

[728] Ibid., 189.

partisans with scraps from their booty. Sometimes services rendered to the partisans by villagers were rewarded handsomely by stolen booty, as Moshe Baran recollects:

> A farmer Kowarski brought my family out of Ghetto Krasny [Krasne near Mołodeczno] …
>
> After I escaped from the ghetto and joined the partisans in the nearby forest, I approached Kowarski to find out the feasibility of rescuing my family. …
>
> Kowarski rescued my brother and sister in December 1942. On March 17, 1943, he rescued my mother …
>
> We paid him with cattle and other goods taken from farmers outside the area where the partisans operated.[729]

The assessment of Oswald Rufeisen, a Jew who joined the Soviet partisans in Naliboki forest, is perhaps the most candid, while at the same time displaying a deep appreciation of the plight of the partisans.

> I was in the forest because I wanted to live, and, as I did, I was robbing innocent people. … To be a partisan was not simple. It was something between a hero and a robber. We had to live and we had to deprive the peasants of their meager belongings. These natives were punished by the Nazis and by us. … At least if they were pro-German it would have been easier. This usually was not the case. Most of the time we took by force from poor peasants who were not even pro-Nazi. …
>
> For me, one of the worst things was the plunder. The peasants were anyway robbed by the Germans. They were poor. It was horrible to see how they were deprived. … Yet we had to do it. They would not have given us on their own. We were in a predicament. … Sometimes we would take away the last cow, or the last horse. …
>
> At stake in the operations against farmers were moral issues. I am thinking about the forceful confiscations of goods that belonged to other people. Sometimes partisans would take a horse in one village and then sell it for vodka in another village. I would have understood had they taken a horse in one place and sold it for wheat in another place. But often this was not the case.[730]

Rufeisen thus effectively dispels the notion that robbing was an act of heroism or even defiance against the authorities. Those who ran into conflict with the peasants as a result cannot blame those whom they robbed. As we know from Jewish memoirs, the food-gathering expeditions also became a bone of contention between the Soviet and Jewish partisans. After their complaints to the Soviets seemingly fell on deaf ears, some villagers took matters into their own hands by apprehending the pillagers and delivering them to the Soviet partisan command. This, however, did not stop the onslaught.[731]

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[729] Moshe Baran, "The Farmer Kowarski," in Brostoff and Chamovitz, *Flares of Memory,* 37.

[730] Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 192, 194, 201–202.

[731] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 120.

11. Villagers Defend Themselves Against Raids

In view of continued assaults and relentless pillaging, the peasants armed themselves and formed self-defence groups. The formation of village self-defence was strongly encouraged by the Germans, who were short on manpower, for their own purposes, namely to safeguard the food supplies the peasants were required to deliver up. The purpose of these groups was not to attack forest Jews or Soviet and Jewish partisans, a war which the villagers could never hope to win, but to protect their meagre possessions. The truth of the matter is that villagers who had the audacity to attempt to protect their property and fend off marauders of various descriptions are automatically branded as Nazi collaborators in Holocaust memoirs and are deserving of retribution. At times this gives rise to rather ironic scenarios described by Jewish survivors themselves:

> At night we foraged for food for all of us. We learned how to steal live geese, lambs, chickens and ducks. … During one such episode in the village of Puniszcze, we were shot at. We later found out that we were stealing geese on a farm where, unknown to us, two Jewish men were hidden. They had two rifles and when told by the farmer that someone was in their barn, came out and fired a shot. We fired back, thinking they were German collaborators. It was a very dark, rainy spring night and we each went our separate ways, not knowing who the other party was. After we were liberated, we compared stories and finally sorted it out. Our cousin Folke Zilberman and my friend Hirshke Einhorn were the ones who fired the first shot.[732]

> I came with a small group of Jewish fighters into a village, and was told that a group of Jews are resting in a hay barn. They thought they were already in "paradise", in an area controlled by the partisans. In fact, it was a hostile [sic] village, as we entered the barn they thought we were Germans and panicked. It took us some time to calm them down … I requisitioned a few wagons and brought them all to the partisan zone.[733]

The impact of these raids, from the perspective of the local farmers, was devastating. The following are the experiences of a Polish family by the name of Kazuro, who lived in the hamlet of Zareże, some 7 km from Duniłowicze, at the hands of constant "visitors" from the forest. Karol and Maria Kazuro sheltered an impoverished Jewish family, the Gordons, consisting of two adults and two young children, for almost three years without any remuneration.

> We all had to pitch in to support the Jewish family. We [three children] helped our parents in almost all the work in the field and at home. … There was so much food that had to be prepared. There were six of us including grandma and four Jews—all together ten people. …
>
> A separate problem was the food supply, which was very scarce. We had a farm of sorts. Father had to provide mandatory quotas of farm produce to the Germans, and on top of that the forests

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[732] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 136.

[733] Account of Boris Green (Greniman) in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 1 (1984), 542–43.

were full of [Soviet] partisans who also had to eat something. It seemed that there were few of them who actually fought with the Germans. Most of them were people from the margins of society, thieves and bandits who lived from depriving others. They hid in the forests and called themselves partisans. They had arms and attacked in the day and night, sometimes several times a day. They took everything they could lay their hands on. I remember well how terrifying it was, how we were forced against the wall while they stole everything they could, loaded it up on wagons and drove away.

They took not only food but also clothing, blankets, pillows, duvets, not to mention chickens and geese. My parents were in tears and nearly broke down, and we children looked on at them in their state of despair and also cried. We ourselves often had nothing to eat but had to take food to the Jews who, from their hiding place, could not see what was happening to us outside.

We had to work hard. Every day was tedious. Mum baked bread herself and a bandit attack during that time resulted in the entire batch of freshly baked, still warm bread being taken. They also took flour, buckwheat, everything. Thus we couldn't really raise animals or poultry because they immediately took all of them. I often saw my parents in tears, exhausted both physically and emotionally, and at the limit of human endurance. Our only salvation was the fish caught in the lake.

It is difficult to appreciate today how hard it was to survive. On the one hand, we were continuously preoccupied with ordinary, prosaic matters; on the other hand, we were constantly fearful for our lives. On the one hand, the Germans sought out Jews and laid ambushes for the partisans; on the other hand, the partisans laid ambushes for the Germans. The partisans sat around at our house consuming our food and we had to cook for them. We were in a state of fear that if the Germans should arrive, then a battle would ensue right there.[734]

The accounts of Christians are corroborated by the testimony of Jewish survivors from that region. Liba Zaidlin, who was sheltered by several Poles and Belorussians, describes the fate of one of her rescuers, Stefan Paszkiewicz, as follows:

He also took great care of us. One day while we were hiding there, a unit of Jewish partisans entered his home and demanded food supplies. Stephan begged them not to take everything he had since he was hiding a Jewish woman and his [sic] son in his home. The Jewish partisans were very cruel to him, taking everything from him since they did not care at all about our fate. In great shock, he came to me and told me about their behavior. He said, "I am endangering my life for Jews and look at how these partisans treated me!" I was very ashamed and did not know what to say. Despite this incident, he did not tell me to leave his home. After a while, some non-Jewish partisans also arrived at his house and demanded that he give them food. Again, he told them that he was hiding Jews in his house and begged them not to take all of the food. The commander of the

[734] Account of Romualda Soroko (née Kazuro), the youngest of the Kazuro children (in the author's possession). After their rescue, the Gordons thanked the Kazuros profusely saying that they would never forget them and would keep in contact. Through the family of another Polish rescuer from the vicinity, the Kazuros learned much later that the Gordons had settled in Toronto. They never communicated with the Kazuros, however, and ignored Romualda's repeated requests to have her parents recognized by Yad Vashem, despite the intervention of representatives of the local Yad Vashem organization. Confirmation of the rescue is found in Riwash, *Resistance and Revenge,* 144, reproduced earlier.

> partisans had said that he could not take with him a woman and a child into the forest, but agreed to leave some of the food.[735]

The raids carried out by Soviet and Jewish partisans also led to clashes with the Polish underground, who had to assume the role of protectors of the local population once the partisans became an organized, active force.[736] These encounters take on a distinctly apologetic and ethnonationalist focus in Jewish memoirs.

> Then suddenly we encountered the White Poles, they were Jew-killers and murderers of the worst kind. … Once we send [sic] 6 men to bring food for our "Otriad", we marched a short distance behind them, and suddenly encountered a large group of Poles, they were "White-Polish" bandits and attacked us immediately. Luckily it was a pitch dark night, they couldn't see how many we were. We killed a few of them, and managed to extricate ourselves from that village but without food.[737]

Moreover, the peasants were caught in a bind. On the one hand, Soviet and Jewish partisans were demanding provisions under threat of violence, while on the other hand, any indication that the peasants were supplying partisans with food (e.g., missing livestock), or even not reporting their presence in the area, incurred severe punishment from the Germans. Villages that defaulted on their delivery of mandatory food quotas because of confiscations by partisans were often destroyed because the Germans suspected the villagers of supporting the partisans.

> Severe measures against farmers who failed to perform their duties were imposed in Vilnius [Wilno] District (undoubtedly, repressions in the District were preconditioned by other factors too, activity of Polish and Soviet underground, and a more complex political situation in general). The letter of 2 March 1943 by Gebietskommissar of Vilnius district concerning the sabotage of delivery of quotas indicated that announcements by the end of 1942 made it "plain" to all the population of villages and urged them to fulfil their obligations as well as threatened them with "strict and very strict" punishment. The deliveries of quotas improved to a certain extent, but they hardly reached the required levels, thus, H. Wulff ordered to gun down "undoubted" saboteurs of quota delivery. According to H. Wulff, the "security services" gunned down 40 saboteurs in deifferent rural districts between 5 and 17 February 1943. Before the poor people were shot, they had been

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[735] Libe Levitanus Zaidlin (née Papkin), aka Liba Levitanos-Zaidlin, "The Trials and Tribulations Confronting the Face of Death," in *The Book of Druya and the Communities of Miory, Druysk and Leonpol,* Internet: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Druya/Druya.html>, translation of Mordekhai Neishtat, ed., *Sefer Druja ve-kehilot Miory, Drujsk, ve Leonpol* (Tel Aviv: Druja and Surrounding Region Society, 1973), 201 ff.

[736] For some examples of Home Army reprisals in the vicinity of Rudniki forest see Borodziewicz, *Szósta Wileńska Brygada AK,* 43, 101–103, 199–200. These reprisals targeted armed marauders regardless of nationality or partisan affiliation, and both Polish partisans and marauders fell in the confrontations. Marauders who were taken captive were generally set free.

[737] "A Child Partisan from Voronova," in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 2 (1985), 614 (based on the Lida Memorial Book).

interrogated for 20–30 minutes. The executions were carried out in public by forcing the population and officials of local governments to the places of killings.[738]

The Germans combed the forests and wiped out all the positions and bases left by the partisans. They also set fire to dozens of villages whose inhabitants were suspected of aiding the partisans. … From afar, the echoes of explosions were heard. The Germans were bombing Russka Forest and the villages suspected of sympathy towards the partisans.[739]

After a few weeks of fighting, the [first] blockade [of the Koziany forest in October 1942] suddenly ended. The German army units had been transferred on to Stalingrad. Before they left, they burned all the villages in, and close to the forest. The farmers in each place were told to assemble for a meeting and while they were concentrated in one building the Germans set it on fire. Men, women and children, in village after village, were burned alive. The Germans wanted to make sure that no one could, or would help the partisans and the Jews again. They tried to make sure that we were deprived of food and supplies.[740]

The devastation left by the Germans [in the fall of 1943] was inconceivable. Many Jews were killed by the Nazis. A large number of them had come to our forest from Narocz seeking to escape a blockade of their forest and instead walked into a terrible trap. Villages as far as 20 kilometres from the forest fell before the German onslaught. Homes where Jewish men and women had been hidden by the Gentile population were burned, with their occupants still alive inside. …

The Nazis spent three weeks combing the [Koziany] forest, aided by dogs, planes and spies, trying to kill as many people as they could find and report the number of "partisans" killed to the High Commander. Of course, Jewish men, women and children, armed or unarmed, were counted as partisans. Unarmed Jews were captured and brutally tortured before they were killed.

It was during their withdrawal that the Nazis began burning dozens of villages. While some of the peasants and farmers from those villages took to the forest to save their lives, some of the Jews left the forest in a daring effort to reach the homes of the Gentiles who had hidden them before there were partisans in our forest.[741]

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[738] Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* 98–99. As the author notes, these operations targeted mostly Poles.

[739] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 124, 156.

[740] Silverman, *From Victims to Victors,* 125.

[741] Ibid., 191–92. According to Jarosław Wołkonowski, as a result of raids staged by the Germans in the regions of Brasław and Postawy in the fall of 1943, more than thirty villages were burned and several thousand peasants were killed on suspicion of helping Soviet partisans. See Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 85.

My unit went towards the marsh areas between Donilowitz [Duniłowicze] and Mydel [Miadzioł]. … After a few days we realized that the Germans had punished the farmers and burned all the villages.[742]

In September 1943 … the Germans went to the forest with a big army. Somewhere between 30–40,000 soldiers. Unlike the other blockades which lasted only a day, this blockade lasted for two weeks. Many of the villages that they suspected the residents for helping the partisans and the Jews were burned. The residents were taken to Germany.[743]

Meanwhile the Partisans organized a whole "Partisan Zone". … The farmers who lived in the Partisan Zone "paid" taxes to the partisans. (It was grain or other agricultural products.) It was a "country within a country". …

Anyway in the summer of 1943 the Germans organized a blockade around the whole Partisan Zone in our area [in the vicinity of Miadzioł]. …

We watched the Germans, collecting the villagers. They took them to work to Germany. Their only "crime" was that they lived near to the Partisan Zone. … During the blockade the Germans burned down most of the villages which belonged to the Partisan Zone. They took many of the people to Germany to work there.[744]

The Nazis regarded the partisans as robbers and executed them without hesitation, both as a deterrent and to inflict fear in anyone considering joining. Often the Germans took reprisals against the townspeople for partisan actions in the area. Polikov understood this. Kanapelka didn't care who paid the price for his sorties.[745]

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[742] Account of Shimon Zimmerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

[743] Account of Yitzhak Zimerman in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.* This account describes the heroism of a Jewish woman who would not betray her Christian benefactors: "Fayga Lea Sorrel's [sic] was caught by the Germans in one of the searches. She was brought to the village of Sterenski [sic] where there was a German headquarters. They tortured her very severely and tried to make her admit that in the villages the Jews of the woods were getting food. The villagers watched her be [sic] tortured and were very scared. They knew that their lives were dependent on what she said. For three days they tortured her with everything, but she denied everything. She kept saying that the gentiles beat her mercilessly in the villages and they ran us out of their homes and everything that we have to eat is only from what we managed to steal from the fields or what the partisans give us. When they saw that the torture was not going to get them anywhere, the Germans started a new tactic by promising all sorts of things. They even tried to trick her by bringing her to a gentile who already confessed that he was giving food to the Jews of the woods. But she claimed right in front of the gentile that he was lying, that he was one of the cruelest villagers and that he caused many troubles to the Jews. A few days later, she died from torture. When the villagers heard that she died, they were unusually emotional. … They secretly took her body and buried it in the graveyard in Sterensky [sic] and they would go to her grave and pray as if she were a saint."

[744] Account of Jehoash Alperovitch in Meyerowitz, *The Scroll of Kurzeniac.*

[745] Account of Zalman Katz in Abram, *The Light After the Dark,* 21–22.

In mid-September [1942] large German military concentrations appeared on all the roads around the towns and villages near the partisan encampments. Contact between the partisan scouts and the village activists was almost totally cut off. …

Thursday the 17th of September the German raids began. Massive military equipment was used to break into the partisan forests. The barricades stopped the tanks only temporarily … Electric saws began cutting through the barricades. Peasants, pressed into service by the Germans, cleared away the debris. A way into the forest lay open. The enemy attacked from three directions, assisted by reconnaissance planes that hung low over the treetops, reporting the location of the partisan units. Coming from Zhireva [Żerewa], Meremin [Mironim], Dobribor [Dobry Bór], Ivacevici [Iwacewicze], Kossovo [Kossów], Ruzany [Różana], they tightened an iron noose around the partisan zones, cutting off all contact with the outside world. …

On a little clearing in the forest stood the Jewish family camp with its 360 people. … On Sunday September 20th they reached a clearing and decided to spend the night there. The 150 survivors fell exhausted to the ground. The five babies demanded to be fed and the desperate mothers did not know what to do. … Weeping spasmodically, half-demented, the five mothers suffocated their babies, one after the other, then tore the hair out of their own heads or beat their own heads against the tree trunks. …

On the third day of the raid two partisans brought the word that the Germans had burned down all the partisan camps, killing many and taking the boots off dead bodies.

The fourth day … Enemy planes searched for hidden partisans and rained down bullets. The dead lay everywhere.

Wednesday, the sixth day of the enemy attack, the survivors in the camp were so exhausted they could hardly stand. Most of them had become apathetic, completely indifferent to their fate. …

The Germans had left the forest. … The two German divisions had laid waste many villages, burning down houses along with the people inside them.[746]

Since August 1943, the situation, particularly in Eastern Lithuania [i.e., territory around Wilno that had belonged to Poland in the interwar period], had been complicated by strengthening activity of the Soviet military underground and German response measures, i.e., incineration of villages, deportation of their people to Germany as labour, and other repressions. … the punitive and manhunt operation "Sommer" on 23 August 1943 by the Germans in Eastern Lithuania, of the scope never seen before. It involved units of German gendarmerie, Latvian and Estonian battalions, i.e. approximately 5 thousand executioners in total who were led by Maj. Gen. A. Harm and Gebietskommissar of Vilnius [Wilno] district H. Wulff. The operation started in Švenčionys [Święciany] and Svyriai [Świr] Counties. … Švenčionys District came under particularly severe devastation. The inhabited areas were surrounded at night and armed guards were placed along the roads and paths. At the dawn, loudspeakers urged people to gather in one place, i.e. the marketplace, of the towns. Residential houses were searched and personal property was looted. … Men and women between 15 and 45 years of age were particularly "hunted". The executions were accompanied with noise and shooting by the executioners, cry and moan of the arrested. There were injured and gunned-down, too. … The arrested were driven to the railway stations, from where they

[746] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 342–45.

> were transported to different directions. According to the data of the underground, more than 2 thousand persons were deported from Švenčionys County.
>
> The wave of manhunt in Švenčionys spread towards Vilnius and the surroundings … were devastated. …
>
> The punitive expedition brought about harsh socio-economic consequences. It left incinerated, raged villages and non-harvested fields behind in Eastern Lithuania.[747]

At the same time as threatening reprisals for not meeting their food quotas, the Germans armed the peasants and ordered them to fend off partisan raids and to alert the authorities when these occurred. A vicious cycle ensued in which innocent peasants were also caught up. The following description pertains to the vicinity of Rudniki forest:

> There were over three hundred Jews in camp, and the most important task was keeping them alive. At night, Abba [Kovner] sent partisans to steal food and guns. About twenty fighters went on each mission. … A raid might yield a cow, two pigs, a horse, a sack of potatoes. If the partisans found someone helping the enemy [usually these were people who simply wanted to protect their own property—*M.P.*], they went out of their way to kill him. If these same peasants helped out the partisans, however, the Germans exacted a far harsher punishment. When a boy in town near Rudnicki [Rudniki] gave information to the partisans, a German unit invaded the town, drove the people into their wooden houses and set the houses on fire. All that remains of the town [Pirciupie or Pirczupie] today is a clearing and a statue of a weeping woman.
>
> The peasants in the nearby villages began to resist the Jewish partisans. … The farmers would … hide food and guns. … Villages organized militias, which were supplied by the Germans. A system of couriers and flares was devised. …
>
> Yourgis [Henoch Ziman "Jurgis"] told Abba to disguise his troops. If the Jews wore quilted coats like the Russians or short boots like the Poles, they would be less easy to identify. …
>
> Abba instead responded with [more] force, meeting every threat with gunfire. If a partisan met a peasant in the forest, the partisan would kill the peasant before he could sound the alarm. On the raids, the Jews took no chances, shot their way into towns and shot their way out, sometimes even killing civilians, women and children.[748]

Jewish partisans, acting alone or in concert with Soviet partisans, (whom one Jewish partisan accused of thinking about little more than "robbery and pillage and all kinds of adventures"),[749] not only engaged in frequent provision-gathering expeditions (sometimes posing as Polish partisans), but also staged "punitive" operations against impoverished peasants reluctant to part with their possessions. Houses of worship and religious objects were also not spared, and a number of Catholic priests were put to death. In Niestaniszki

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[747] Zizas, *Persecution of Non-Jewish Citizens of Lithuania, Murder of Civilian Populations (1941–1944),* 84–86. As the author notes, these operations targeted mostly Poles.

[748] Cohen, *The Avengers,* 119–20.

[749] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 129.

near Świr, Soviet partisans fell on the church and robbed both the priest and the faithful who were gathered there in prayer.[750] During a raid on Szemietowszczyzna near Świr, Rev. Stefan Romanowski died of a heart attack when his rectory was burned down in February 1942.[751] Rev. Edward Murończyk, the pastor of Dubrowy near Wilejka, was executed by Soviet partisans on October 20, 1942.[752] During a raid on Drozdowszczyzna near Duniłowicze in June 1943, Soviet partisans killed four villagers and the local priest, Rev. Eugeniusz Łatecki.[753] Rev. Roman Mosiewicz was murdered in Traby on September 12, 1943, Rev. Antoni Grzybowski was executed in Albertyn near Słonim on October 20, 1943, and Rev. Piotr Wojno-Orański was shot in the back of his head on January 20, 1944 after leaving Traby for Holszany.[754] These tactics further strained relations with the local population and, eventually, led to a collision with the Polish partisans.

In some cases, the Belorussian population was targeted by Soviet partisans in their war against pockets of rural resistance or "vigilantes," as was the case in "Operation Lanceviche."

> Our political commissar briefed us on the imperative of our assignment—the breaking up of the vigilante stronghold at Lanceviche [Łancewicze]. …
>
> The village of Lanceviche was fifteen kilometers or so south of Derechin [Dereczyn]. Most of its houses were of wood with roofs of straw or shingles, easy to set afire. In actions against the vigilantes, we had begun following a new strategy, with men from different platoons working together. … Mortar fire from our positions struck the houses, setting them on fire. Victorious, loaded down with booty, we left the area in broad daylight. …
>
> The destruction of Lanceviche maked the first time we had carried out our reprisals on civilians, and it did achieve our goal, which was to break resistance to the Underground. For a long time, the vigilantes did not bother us again.[755]

Occasionally, even German field reports showed sympathy for the plight of the local population caught up in this predicament. A report from March 1943 on the situation in the Słonim district commented that

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[750] Report of the government in exile's delegate for the Nowogródek district, Archiwum Akt Nowych (Central Archives of Modern Records), Warsaw, Delegatura Rządu collection, sygnatura 202/III–121, karta 244.

[751] Krahel, *Martyrologia duchowieństwa archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939–1945,* 363.

[752] Krahel, *Martyrologia duchowieństwa archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939–1945,* 300.

[753] Krahel, *Martyrologia duchowieństwa archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939–1945,* 269–70.

[754] Tadeusz Krahel, *Archidiecezja wileńska w latach II wojny światowej: Studia i szkice* (Białystok: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej–Oddział w Białymstoku, 2014), 168–69; Krahel, *Martyrologia duchowieństwa archidiecezji wileńskiej 1939–1945,* 295–96, 458, 591.

[755] Zissman, *The Warriors,* 141–42.

> a peasant has no choice but either to be robbed and possibly murdered by the [Soviet] partisans in due course, or to be rounded up for work in the *Reich* or even shot by a German police unit during the 'cleansing' of a partisan-infested area. In this way conditions have been created, which if any sort of comparison is possible, without doubt can only be compared with the conditions of the German peasant during the Thirty Year War.[756]

Leo Heiman, a member of the Rokossovsky Brigade and later an intelligence officer in the Israeli army, provides a candid description of the various strategies employed by the Soviet partisans to carry out organized looting in the countryside, the German response to those measures, and their devastating impact on the civilian population.

> The villages in our own partisan-controlled zone had been impoverished by constant raids and supply operations. Not a single horse was left in most of them. Many had been razed by the Germans during punitive expeditions and antipartisan offensives. Crops had been destroyed, cattle slaughtered, and the peasants wiped out or driven into the forest. This meant that we had to get our supplies from villages outside the partisan-controlled zone.
>
> Most such [Belorussian] villages had strong police or home guard garrisons, though, which greeted us with machinegun and rifle fire. Looting pigs and horses and robbing the peasants of their bread and potatoes was a very prosaic mission without any heroics and glory. But it was more difficult than blowing up a train or ambushing an enemy convoy on the road. It was more dangerous, too. [757]

> The Germans did one thing, however, which made later partisan operations difficult. They burned villages, razed farms, and seized all cattle and horses. The peasants who did not flee were either killed or deported to slave labor camps. The scorched-earth policy forced the partisans to get their food and horses within the German-controlled zones—within shooting range of police forts, railroad stations, fortified strongholds, military barracks, and cities with strong garrisons.
>
> To solve the thorny problems of logistics, the Central Headquarters of the Soviet Partisan Movement devised a 10-point program, good in theory, but unworkable in actual practice.
>
> Stealing was strictly forbidden, and partisans found guilty of theft were executed by firing squad … A guerrilla became guilty of theft if he took anything without first informing the property's owner of the seizure's purpose and identifying himself as a member of the Soviet partisan forces.
>
> Initially, the Central Headquarters' instructions commanded the partisans to issue receipts for anything seized from the farmers. The receipts had to be signed by partisan commanders or commissars. But the signed receipt system was misused by bandit gangs and criminal elements posing as partisans who robbed the peasants, issued fancy receipts, and prmised to redeem everything after the Soviet Army returned to the occupied regions. [In fact, as very many documents show, it was widely misused by the Soviet partisans themselves. *M.P.*]

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[756] This document is cited in Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust,* 146.

[757] Heiman, "Organized Looting: The Basis of Partisan Warfare," *Military Review* (February 1965): 64–65.

New instructions eventually put an end to tbe signed receipt system. Only brigade or detachment commanders were authorized to order seizures of food, clothing, or animals, and to conduct expropriation operations.

Looting of money, jewelry, toilet articles, personal effects, and, in fact, anything but basic foods, horses, and working tools, was forbidden. Infractions against this rule were punishable by death.

Small groups of partisans detached from their units on sabotage reconnaissance and other missions entailing an absence of more than 24 hours from camp were authorized to enter farms and villages and ask for food. They could also seize horses to facilitate their movement or to evacuate their wounded.

As a rule, these instructions were obeyed by most guerrilla formations. But there were many loopholes and exceptions which led to rape, murder, wholesale pillaging, and other excesses.

The most notorious loophole was Order 100-JAT which authorized the execution of "enemies of the people," their immediate relatives, and the confiscation of their property. Up to the spring of 1943, only real traitors and pro-Nazi collaborators—German-appointed village headmen and police chiefs—were so classified and were shot or hanged. Order 100-JAT, flashed by radio to all partisan units in May 1943, changed this. Now, all persons employed by the German administration who willingly facilitated the enemy's war effort or helped the occupation regime were to be classified as "enemies of the people." A railroad stationmaster, for example, who went on working for the Germans thus became an enemy of the people, and was placed on the liquidation lists unless he agreed to cooperate with the partisans, leak vital information to their agents, and plant time bombs supplied by guerrilla saboteurs.

The order opened new vistas for partisan looting. Since everything had to be confiscated or destroyed, everything could be looted. Before that, most seasoned partisans preferred two combat missions to one supply operation which was dangerous and tedious. But now there was no lack of volunteers for operations within the framework of Order 100-JAT and most "enemies of the people," real and imaginary, took refuge in German-held cities. With sources dwindling, partisan commanders had to think fast to keep their men dressed and fed. The result was the "Double Quota" order.

German occupation authorities had imposed agricultural delivery quotas upon every farm and village. Peasants who fell behind in handing over eggs, butter, milk, meat, and wool for the occupation authorities were flogged the first time, seriously beaten for the second offense, and hanged in the marketplace the third time.

The Double Quota order opened with a lofty preamble that supplying agricultural deliveries to the enemy was tantamount to treason, since it helped the German war effort in the Soviet Union. A village which honored its supply commitments to the Germans would be "severely punished" (burned) by "provisional Soviet authorities" (partisans), unless it supplied twice as much to the "defenders of the people" (partisans).

The result was that most villages were looted and burned either by the partisans, for failing to comply with the Double Quota order, or by the Germans, for, having halted agricultural deliveries to the occupation authorities. All this generated additional hatreds and bitterness which served our

over-all political-psychological purpose, but which complicated our supply problems a hundredfold.[758]

[758] Heiman, "Organized Looting: The Basis of Partisan Warfare," *Military Review* (February 1965): 66–68.

12. The Raids Intensify

Raids on villages, which went by various code or slang names such as *bombyozhka* ("bombardment") and *zagotovka* ("stocking up"), would take on the following appearance:

> Partisan food collections, known as "bambioshka" ["bombyozhka"], took place at night. From the Bielski otriad, "Every night one or two groups were sent out to bring food. A group consisted of ten or twelve armed men. One of these men acted as the leader. Some of the participants had to be familiar with the side roads and the particular villages. Of course, one had to select people that first of all were not afraid and second of all to whom the peasants would give food."
>
> When a group reached a village it would first collect provisions from the richest [of the poor—*M.P.*] farms. As one partisan explains, this was possible because "In each village we had a peasant, usually himself poor, he would give us information about the other peasants. This way we knew what each had, how many horses, cows, etc. Such a peasant we called 'legalshchyk.' We took nothing from him. Sometimes we would give him some of the booty. Some of the rich peasants tried to hide their products … we would search and if this was the case, we took more from them."
>
> Toward the end of 1942 horse-drawn wagons, confiscated from farmers, were used for food expeditions. When a group left a village, it had to subdivide and prepare the goods on the way back to the camp. For example, cows had to be killed and cut into manageable portions. All this had to be done quickly. At dawn a group was expected to be back at the base—daylight was the partisans' enemy.[759]

> Some Russian partisans felt that the local population was becoming more hostile toward all guerilla fighters only because the Jews had been confiscating too many goods. Jews were accused of robbing the local people of forbidden items.
>
> There was a certain amount of truth to these accusations. Some Jewish partisans would take honey, eggs, and meats from villages that were friendly toward the partisans. This was forbidden. At Russian headquarters it was assumed that these luxury items could be confiscated only from [allegedly—*M.P.*] pro-Nazi villages.[760]

> So twice a week, during the evening, we went out to the unfriendly farmers who were cooperating with the Germans [i.e., by reporting robberies]. We asked them for food and we would take it on our own if they didn't give it to us. If we found some [abandoned] Jewish memorabilia in their homes … we got mad and smashed up everything in their houses. Sometimes, we beat those jerks up a little. …
>
> I established myself as the leader of the group and always went out on food raids from the farmers in the region. … We would break into the houses and steal lots of food and clothing. Then we would smash the windows and the furniture. We killed their dogs when they bit us. …
>
> We had already conducted a number of raids in this area, as often as twice a week. I figured that in one of the rich farms in that community [Piesochna?] I could find decent clothing for Rochelle

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[759] Tec, *Defiance,* 86.

[760] Ibid., 105.

and also bring back some good food to celebrate her arrival. So we went, four of us, including Liss. We all carried pistols and rifles, and in addition a pair of binoculars I had taken on one of the previous farm raids.

Things went very badly. About a half mile or so we reached the farm we had in mind, the police opened fire. …

But then we found out about a very large farm a mile or so outside of Mir … We figured that we could make such a large food haul from that one estate that it would reduce the need for making smaller raids so frequently—twice or three times a week, as we usually did. …

Our advantage was that we were, by this stage, well-supplied with pistols and rifles and hand grenades and even some automatic weapons. … We talked over our plans for the raid with two other small groups and finally we reached an agreement—each of the three groups would send four men. We would take as much in the way of food, clothing, and supplies as we could carry and split it evenly between the three groups. …

There were about seven people at home, the old parents and some of the daughters and maybe some servants as well. Immediately they started crying and begging. We held our rifles on them …

We opened up the trapdoor to the cellar and found down there a number of big barrels full of food—salted pork, ham, sausages, honey, bread, and more. [This was undoubtedly the family's entire food supply for the long winter months. *M.P.*] We hauled all of the food out of the cellar, then herded all of the residents of the house back down in there. We told them to sit there quietly or else we would kill them and burn the entire place down. … We then covered up the trapdoor with some very heavy furniture …

Meanwhile, three of our men … found a small number of calves and sheep … [they bound] their feet to make it easier to take them along.

Then we had to figure out how to carry all of the food away. We solved the problem by finding two hauling sleds alongside their barn. We hitched two horses to each of these, then loaded them up with the livestock and the barrels. We packed in some Christmas baked goods we found—cookies and cakes. We also took lots of warm clothing and some cooking utensils and tools—any useful things we could find. Even with the four horses and the two sleds, that was all we could handle at one time.

Before we left, we debated amongst ourselves as to whether to burn the place down or not. … one of the men found some large canisters filled with kerosene and emptied them all around the house, on the rugs, furniture, and woodwork. He was hoping that the residents might set fire to the house themselves, once they managed to push open the trapdoor and then attempted to light some lamps in the house, which we had left totally dark.

We managed to transport the loaded sleds most of the way back to our bunkers.[761]

We went to the villages and took food. If they betrayed us, the next day the whole village was on fire. In this particular *otrad* [the Kirov otriad] there were thirty Jews. …

I had a gun, and I had a rifle. … You got your boots where you got your food, in the villages. We went for what we called a "*bombioshka*." You "bummed" whatever you could. One night I went out with a group of other partisans. I climbed up to an attic of a house … I threw down boots and

[761] Sutin, *Jack and Rochelle,* 62, 67–68, 93–94, 95–97.

overcoats and fur coats from the attic for the other people to take. That was when everybody got dressed so nicely in boots and coats.[762]

This is how a foray was carried out: first, guards were set up on both sides of the village and then the fighters were divided up into smaller groups of three to four people. Each group entered a house and asked the peasant to prepare a quantity of food. While the peasant and his family were preparing the food, the partisans searched for arms and confiscated everything that could help the camp, including clothes and utensils. When everything was ready, the peasant was told to hitch up a wagon, load it with his goods, and remain in his home for a time if he valued his life. At the edge of the village, at a predesignated spot, all the wagons would gather and together they would leave for the forest. The whole operation was carried out in great haste, for they wanted to reach safety before dawn. The horses and wagons were later returned to the peasants, several of whom would sometimes wait on the edge of the forest.

In the beginning both the partisans and the peasants lacked experience. … The peasants learned how to hide their food and belongings, claiming the Germans took everything away from them, while the partisans learned how to locate the hidden food supplies, either by stripping the peasants or threatening them. Naturally, the peasants reported the thefts to the Germans. It occasionally happened that a caravan of loaded wagons making its way to the forest suddenly came under heavy fire from a German ambush along the road. …

The partisans finally started using trickery: they would take several peasants with them as wagoneers, and so as not to risk an ambush attack, would send the peasants ahead with the wagons. Only after the peasants passed safely through the dangerous area would the partisans follow. At the edge of the forest they would free the peasants and send them home. Not wanting to risk their own lives, the peasants finally stopped asking for help from the Germans.

… In their complaints to the German authorities they reported that "Jewish bandits" robbed them of their possessions and gave them no rest. They asked for German protection against this lawlessness. German help was not late in coming. The Germans began distributing arms among the villagers. They also hired agents among the peasants and spread antipartisan propaganda. In most of the villages, the peasants began stationing guards at night, and when the guards detected partisans approaching, they alerted the villagers, who opened fire. The result was that only rarely were forays carried out without clashes and casualties.[763]

Supplying the battalion with food was one of the most frequent missions the partisans had to fulfil. … The twenty-five partisans who were assigned the task, or as the partisans put it, to carry out *"zagotovka"* (purveyance), we were supplied with only thirteen rifles. The command of the "Death to the Occupier" battalion [detachment] had to apply to one of the Jewish units and ask them to lend them another twelve rifles. …

Anton Bonder, a unit sergeant, announced that we should be prepared for a mission to obtain provisions. The partisans who were sent on this mission, began to clean their weapons. At three,

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[762] Account of Aida Brydbord (Chaja Czerczewska) in Gurewitsch, *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters,* 274. This account was originally published in the *Journal of the Center for Holocaust Studies,* vol. 6, no. 4 (spring 1990).

[763] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 134–35.

they had their meat stew. A group of forty men left the base [in Rudniki forest]. The village we were aiming for was near the village of Eishishkes [Ejszyszki]. We had to walk thirty kilometres in one direction and the same distance back, and these sixty kilometers had to be covered within twenty-four hours. …

We were told to encircle the village, spreading out among the houses, and order the farmers to harness their horses to sleighs and fill them with food, and not to spend too much time doing this and to return immediately. The commander, Michael Trushin, decided on the assembly point: near the bridge on the way back to the forest. He keeps with him the crew with the machine gun and myself as liaison. We all stand alongside the little bridge, prepared to fire on any enemy who turned up.

The village was large, with wooden houses and large peasant barns. The place was quiet and there were no voices to be heard. Everything was done silently. Within an hour, we loaded the sleighs with provisions of every kind. A cow was attached to each sleigh and the procession of sleighs proceeded on its way back to the partisan base. … The farmers sit in their sleighs and spur on the horses while the partisans march on foot alongside the sleighs, fully on guard and with their weapons prepared for any enemy who appeared on the scene. In the village of Vishintchi [Wisińcza], some ten kilometers from the base, we left the farmer-drivers and promised them that on the morrow, they would get their horses back together with the sleighs. They had no alternative but to wait for the return of their horses and sleighs. It was a partisan rule that farmers were not allowed to come near partisan bases [in Rudniki forest]. …

Some five kilometers from the base, I reach one of the lagging sleighs driven by partisan Shara Robinson. … On her sleigh, there are two slaughtered pigs and a sack of potatoes. I turn over my sleigh to her and tell her to proceed to the base. … Two women partisans, who had returned from the supply mission were worn out and hurried to their huts to sleep.[764]

During the night, the partisans also attacked local peasants to secure food. … their stocks of food and clothing carried back to the forests. The peasants, held at gunpoint, were stripped of their leather boots and sheepskin coats. Those farmers who helped the partisans, the dedicated Communists, were not attacked. …

Because the family camps were not usually armed … Mostly, they depended on the good nature of the Jewish partisans to supply them with limited amounts of food such as flour and potatoes. …

The most dangerous jobs involved raids on nearby farms to obtain food. The men who carried out these missions returned with animal carcasses, flour, potatoes, onions, bread, and dairy foods. Because the hospital was staffed by Jews, Papa convinced the raiders to conveniently "lose" some of the food along the way back. The "lost" food went to feed the civilian family groups of women, children, and elderly Jews. … Such tasks were undertaken in great secrecy so as not to arouse the suspicions of the Russians in charge.

On one occasion, the partisans returned with several live animals, including cows, sheep, and chickens.[765]

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[764] Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945,* 332–33.

[765] Brysk, *Amidst the Shadows of Trees,* 58–59, 84. These raids occurred in the area of Lipiczany forest.

Mention was made in one of these accounts of the use by the Soviet partisans of informants or spies from among the rural population, known as "legalshchiks," who were rewarded with some of the booty. One can only assume that, in some cases at least, other villagers eventually caught on, as did non-Soviet partisans. Another way of "recruiting" such persons (also called "legalniks") was through the use of force, as described in an account from the Brańsk area, southwest of Białystok:

> The detachment also forced many Christians to be spies. To tell them everything they had seen or carried as messengers which could only be done by the Christians. They were threatened with death, with burning their houses. They obeyed. Much necessary information came from the forced spies. They called themselves "ligalnikes."

As Polish reports confirm, there was no shortage of raids by Soviet and Jewish partisans and attendant violence visited on the local population.[766] German field reports also recorded the succession of raids that befell a particular area. For instance, on November 9, 1943, about 25 Soviet and Jewish partisans raided the landed estate of Rakliszki near Ejszysyki taking twelve horses, eight cows, three tons of grain, two tons of coal, and 450 German marks. On December 8, a unit of 200 Soviet and Jewish partisans attacked Wilkańce near Ejszyszki. The village was looted, one inhabitant was shot to death, and his farmstead was burned to the ground. On December 12, a group of 50 Jews raided the village of Montwiliszki, completely despoiling the inhabitants and carrying off the loot on 25 wagons. On January 7, 1944, 30 Jewish and Soviet partisans raided Korklinie, Torosinki (?), and the petty gentry hamlet of Songiniszki. They loaded their bounty on 15 wagons and left. On January 25, a Soviet-Jewish group of 25 fighters expropriated Dajnowo and Komarowszczyna, taking nine cows, some pigs, clothes, and other items.[767] The impact of these endless raids on the welfare of the local population was devastating. A seized cow was often a farmer's most valued livestock; pigs, sheep, and other livestock were also taken.

Given the violent methods employed by the Soviet and Jewish groups, altercations were inevitable. The

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A. [Alter] Trus and J. [Julius] Cohen, eds., *Bransk: Sefer hazikaron* (New York: Brainsker Relief Committee of New York, 1948), 357; translated as *Bransk: Book of Memories*, Internet: <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Bransk/Bransk.html>.

[766] Home Army field reports counted 29 assaults in the region of Szczuczyn alone in the course of one month. Such assaults were said to be the partisans' virtually sole pursuit. See Pełczyński, et al., *Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945,* vol. 3: 264. (The relevant report was received March 1, 1944.)

[767] Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, November 17, 1943; Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, December 16, 1943; Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, December 21, 1943; Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, January 13, 1944; Abschrift aus dem Fernschreibdienst der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD, February 3, 1944; OAM, 504–1–7, on microfilm at RG–11.001M, reel 74, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archives. According to a Lithuanian police report, while transporting the stolen goods after the raid on the villages of Korklinie, Torosiškės (Torosinki?) and Songiniszki, the robbers met a self-defence group and came under fire. Reportedly, two Jewish men, one Jewish woman, and their six horses were killed. One auxiliary policeman was seriously wounded, another one slightly. See See Šarūnas Liekis, "Soviet Resistance and Jewish Partisans in Lithuania," *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry,* (Oxford and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), vol. 25: *Jews in the Former Grand Duchy of Lithuania since 1772,* 331–56, at p. 345.

following descriptions are from the perspective of Jewish partisans.

> A week later I was part of a group of ten sent on an "economic action." A Polish village near Hoduciszki was chosen as the target. Upon arriving we left a patrol on guard and ordered four farmers to harness horses to their wagons. We went from house to house taking sacks of potatoes, flour, and meat. We took cows as well. After loading the booty on the wagons and tying the cows behind, we started out for the base, the owners of the wagons driving us. We left them on the river bank, unloaded the provisions at the base, and then sent the farmers with their empty wagons. …
>
> Thirty of us went on an "economic action." The target was a large Lithuanian village twenty-five kilometers from partisan territory, near the town of Constantinova [Konstantynów]. By this time there was nothing left to take from villages nearer by, as they had gradually been relieved of their food reserves and cattle by the many partisans in the Naroch [Narocz] region. It was becoming increasingly difficult to acquire provisions, and more often than not the "economic actions" involved armed combat. The large forces sent on these missions reduced the number free for other partisan activities.[768]

> One evening three lads, led by Shlomo Brand, went to the village of Solcza, near Olkieniki [in the vicinity of Rudniki forest], and despite the strong resistance of the peasants, took several wagonloads of food from the village, returning to the forest under a torrent of bullets. …
>
> The more people we had in the partisan camps, the more pressing the matter of a food supply. … Every night groups of fighters went out on food forays. …
>
> The next morning the unit which had set out in a foray had not yet returned. It was headed by Shlomo Brand and consisted of the best fighters. … The worst was already suspected, when suddenly Shlomo and his friends came running and said that on their way they had met with a Polish roving band [doubtless a partisan group who had come to the aid of the villagers who were being robbed—*M.P.*] and only by a miracle did they manage to escape. They had succeeded in collecting several wagons laden with food, but they had to leave them at the edge of the forest among the bushes, a few kilometers from the camp.[769]

> Securing supplies, however, was often more than a matter of persuading reluctant peasants. One such operation I remember most vividly. A detachment, of company strength, under the command of Shlomo Brand, started out at dusk on a wintry day to forage for supplies at a "rich" village, near the town of Ishishok [Ejszyszki], which we reached towards midnight. We posted guards on both sides of the village, and I, together with my men, entered the first farmhouse. … We worked feverishly the night through collecting food, and were ready to retrace our steps when dawn broke. Shlomo and 20 of his men stayed behind to protect our rear, and we started out in our sleighs. … This was by no means an isolated incident. …
>
> We succeeded in wresting considerable quantities of arms and ammunition from villages who collaborated [sic] with the Germans and were supplied with arms by them. Punitive measures were

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[768] Arad, *The Partisan,* 118, 151.

[769] Lazar, *Destruction and Resistance,* 134, 142, 162–63.

> undertaken against collaborators; and one village which was notorious for its hostility to the Jews was burned down completely.[770]

The following accounts are from Naliboki forest where both Bielski and Zorin's partisans were active:

> I was taken to within a kilometer from Nowogródek, where no partisan had yet walked. I obtained food from the population. I collected eight wagons of food in a brief period and then went away, for we began to hear shooting in the direction of Nowogródek.[771]

> The first of May [1944] was approaching. Zorin's people wanted to mark the day with a celebration. Zorin asked us to help his partisans obtain food and we agreed. Fourteen armed comrades [mostly Jews] from the Lithuanian units [from Rudniki forest] went out with ten of Zorin's men on this mission. We walked for a whole day and with sundown entered a village.
>
> Its poverty was evident in the small huts that seemed about to collapse and its underground cellars. We took but a small amount of food from the inhabitants. One's heart was torn and one's conscience objected, but we had to care for the children and the old people who were waiting for it in the unit. [Yet, earlier on it was stated that the "mission" was to get food for the May Day celebration. *M.P.*]
>
> On our return, near the place Zorin's unit was stationed, when dawn was coming up and beginning to disperse the night mists, we were stopped by some Russian partisans, who demanded that we leave the wagons with provisions to them. [It is not clear why there were "wagons" of provisions if only a "small amount" of food had been taken. *M.P.*] We soon discovered that the stories told us about Zorin's unit [i.e., that they were in turn robbed by Russian partisans—*M.P.*] were true.[772]

The success of the food-gathering for the May Day festivities in 1944 was stupendous, considering that Bielski and Zorin's units together with the family camps counted some 2,000 persons and did not raise their own pigs:

> On May 1, everyone gathered in the *puscha* [*puszcza*] for a large May Day celebration … After a lunch during which everyone was given a ration of sausage, the entire group congregated in the

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[770] Account of Israel Weiss in Baruch Kaplinsky, ed., *Pinkas Hrubieshov: Memorial to a Jewish Community in Poland* (Tel Aviv: Hrubieshov Associations in Israel and U.S.A., 1962), xiii. It is likely that the village referred to as being "burned down completely" was the village of Koniuchy. Both Israel Weiss and Shlomo Brand are mentioned in the list of Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest responsible for the massacre. See Kowalski, *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe,* 405–407.

[771] Yechiel Silber, "The Partisans of Sochaczew," in Sztejn (Shtayn, Stein) and Wejszman (Vaysman, Weissman), *Pinkas Sokhatshev,* 514 ff.

[772] Faitelson, *Heroism & Bravery in Lithuania, 1941–1945,* 357. Faitelson states that Zorin's men "would go out to obtain food from areas at some distance from the camp, areas which were very poor and what they succeeded in obtaining was generally taken from them by the Russian partisans." Ibid.

> central square, which was decorated by scores of flapping red flags. The fighters lined up in a military fashion, while the nonfighters, men and women, young and old, also stood at attention.[773]

As this and other descriptions show, the flavour of the Bielski camp was Russian and Yiddish, and its political leaning distinctly pro-Soviet.

> Preparations for festivities were one of the important operations of that [school] group. For Purim, the children made masks for their parents and other adults. … We watched the children sing, and recite in Yiddish or in Russian. They were dressed up for the holiday in white shirts and red ties.[774]

The dire conditions allegedly experienced by those living in family camps in Naliboki forest under the protection of Bielski and Zorin is belied by the leaders of those detachments. While difficult conditions may have prevailed in the early stages, matters changed dramatically as the forest people became adept at pillaging. In a report dated December 5, 1943, Tuvia Bielski boasted that his unit had managed to amass huge quantities of provisions: 200 tonnes of potatoes, three tonnes of cabbage, five tonnes of beets, five tonnes of grain, three tonnes of meat, and a tonne of sausage.[775] The Bielski group's historian recorded:

> An honourable place among the projects was held by the sausage-making factory, which was in a hut nearby. On one of the forays to the villages, a meant-mincer was found, which was a huge bonus. A separate structure for smoking the sausages was also built. Partisans from the neighbouring units brought cattle in exchange for sausages. …
>
> Outside the 'main street' there was a fenced area for the herd of cows owned by the camp. They grazed there, and their number reached at times up to sixty head. From the cow paddock, the horses of the camp could be seen in the distance grazing in the forest, fenced in by empty peasants' carts, with a few boys tending to their needs.[776]

Zorin's aide-de-camp, Anatol Wertheim, presents a similar picture:

> There was no shortage of food, in fact we even had reserves. On the day we joined up with the Red Army we pulled several hundred submerged sacks of flour from the lake (this is an excellent way of preserving flour over extended periods as the outer layers harden after soaking in water and form a peel which protects the rest of the contents). We even sent food surpluses to Moscow. Once a week

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[773] Duffy, *The Bielski Brothers,* 251.

[774] Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 218.

[775] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 80; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 84; Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 199–200.

[776] Kagan, comp., *Novogrudok,* 212.

> a plane would land in a field inside the forest bringing newspapers and propaganda literature, and took away moonshine, lard and sausages of our own making.[777]

A description of the "monotonous" diet of some 300 Jewish partisans in Rudniki forest is also telling. At a time when peasants considered meat to be a great luxury, the Jewish partisans complained: "The diet in camp was the same day after day. Meat and potatoes. Meat and potatoes. Meat and potatoes."[778]

Soviet reports confirm the extent of the plundering and its devastating impact on the population in the area surrounding Naliboki forest: "In the Stołpce and Nieśwież regions only one cow remained for every five to seven farms and one horse for every seven to ten farms."[779] Soviet partisans often stole clothing and household items for which they had no need. Some of the stolen goods, which included furniture and bedding, surfaced in the local markets where they fetched pocket money for the partisans and their forest charges.[780] Soviet partisans committed assaults, rapes and murders and burned down homes and farm buildings. In March 1943, a drunken partisan from the Chkalov Brigade stationed in Naliboki forest murdered 13 inhabitants of the village of Borowikowszczyzna, including young children. On April 24, 1943, on orders from the leader of the Zhukov Brigade, 92 homesteads were burned down in Derewno (or Derewna). As Soviet field reports show, partisans would frequently descend on villages in the Iwie (Iwje)-Juraciszki area for extended drunken orgies.[781]

The most voracious raiders were reputedly the Jewish groups, and this too exacerbated conditions. In one case, Soviet partisans had to intervene on behalf of a villager in Kul, near Rubieżewicze, when Zorin's men seized the few remaining supplies this widow had to feed her young children.[782] Other accounts, including Jewish ones, refer specifically to Jewish marauders assaulting villagers, raping women and taunting the

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[777] Anatol Wertheim, "Żydowska partyzantka na Białorusi," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 144.

[778] Cohen, *The Avengers,* 133.

[779] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 80; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 83.

[780] Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Rozmowy z kapitanem Szabunią," *Zeszyty Historyczne* (Paris), no. 29 (1973): 146; and Zdzisław A. Siemaszko, "Komentarze," *Zeszyty Historyczne,* no. 86 (1988): 165. See also Tec, *In the Lion's Den,* 201–202; and Tec, *Defiance,* 73.

[781] Zygmunt Boradyn, "Stosunki Armii Krajowej z partyzantką sowiecką na Nowogródczyźnie," in Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1941–1945)*, 96–97; Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 84, 98–99; Wołkonowski, *Okręg Wileński Związku Walki Zbrojnej Armii Krajowej w latach 1939–1945,* 190. Such conduct led to interventions by Home Army units on behalf of the beleaguered civilian population. General Platon ordered his forces to apprehend Polish partisans and to spread stories that they were German agents and traitors of the Polish people. See Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgody,* 101–102.

[782] The Soviet partisans executed the Jewish robbers, but Zorin returned to exact revenge on the widow, who somehow survived. See Kazimierz Bondarewicz, "Mój Kul," in Jasiewicz, *Europa nieprowincjonalna,* 890.

local population during raids, thereby provoking violent confrontations.[783] Yakov Ruvimovich, a Soviet-Jewish partisan in that area, provides the most candid and damning indictment of his fellow partisans: "About half of our people were Jews, but what kind of partisans were they? All they did was rob and rape."[784]

One of the strategies adopted by the Soviet (and Jewish) partisans was to set fire to Polish estates which had been confiscated by the Germans, but often continued to be administered by their former Polish owners. The ostensible purpose behind this was to prevent the Germans from amassing and transporting grain and other food supplies to Germany, but the actual consequences were far more devastating. As of January 1, 1944, Soviet partisans boasted the destruction of 217 estates in the Baranowicze district alone.[785] Jewish accounts attest to the eagerness with which this mission was accomplished:

> With the coming of the harvest of the summer crop of 1942, we were getting ready to destroy the harvest stores of the Germans. They had expropriated the large landholdings and the majority of the [Soviet-created] co-operative settlements (*kolkhozes*), and had planted fields for their own needs. … But the large landholdings—they are all in the hands of the enemy. Their fate is—fire!
>
> We divided the great landholdings … We set a time for setting of fires in the whole district. We prepared very well. …
>
> One autumn, at midnight, at a given moment, fires broke out in all the farms … Snipers from the Partisan groups shot at everyone who came to extinguish the flames. The skies grew red over the forest and the fields.[786]

> The partisans also set fire to the sheaves of grain stored near the palace, ready for shipment to Germany. … Large estates which the Germans had taken possession of were burned to the ground.[787]

Although the estates were intended to be a source of food supplies for the Germans, often their Polish administrators siphoned off food for the needs of the local population and the Home Army clandestinely. The raids on the estates therefore constituted a double blow: not only was Polish property destroyed, but

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[783] Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 157; Krajewski, *Na Ziemi Nowogródzkiej,* 163.

[784] Quoted in Jacek Hugo-Bader, "A rewolucja to przecież miała być przyjemność," *Gazeta Wyborcza, Magazyn Gazety* (Warsaw), November 15, 1996. For additional confirmation in Jewish sources, see Samuel Amarant, "The Partisans' Company of Tuvia Belski," in Yerushalmi, *Navaredok Memorial Book,* Internet: <www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Novogrudok/Novogrudok.html>, 333ff.

[785] Boradyn, *Niemen–rzeka niezgodzy,* 81. Memoirs of Jewish partisans also make it clear that the Polish estates were a "prime target." See, for example, Kahn, *No Time To Mourn,* 135.

[786] Nirenstein, *A Tower from the Enemy,* 354. Tuvia Bielski's account is also found in Kowalski, *Anthology on Armed Jewish Resistance, 1939–1945,* vol. 4 (1991), 507. See also Tec, *Defiance,* 84.

[787] Alpert, *The Destruction of Slonim Jewry,* 258–59.

also the Home Army lost an important source of provisions and the local population lost their source of livelihood.[788] According to a Jewish partisan from the Lenin Komsomol Brigade encamped in the Nacza forest, a Polish dairy was destroyed intentionally in order to prevent milk from being delivered to the Home Army.[789] This strategy was ill-conceived (such wanton destruction of national property was virtually unknown in most occupied countries, certainly not in the prosperous countries of Western Europe or in the Czech Protectorate), and it was clearly out of step with the position of the Polish underground authorities. This constituted another source of friction between the Soviets and Jews on the one hand, and the Polish population on the other. Under pressure from the Polish side, the Soviet partisan command belatedly agreed to abandon these disastrous measures.[790]

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[788] Erdman, *Droga do Ostrej Bramy,* 238–39. Needless to say the livelihood of many totally innocent families was wiped out. Moreover, the destruction of the economic infrastructure of the locality meant that the inhabitants were now "unemployed" and thus subject to deportation to the Reich for forced labour.

[789] Testimony of Joe Cameron (Yossele Hamarski), Internet: <www.jewishpartisans.org>. For more on Hamarski see Eliach, *There Once Was a World,* 638.

[790] After negotiations with the Home Army, on June 15, 1943, the command of the Lenin Brigade adopted a resolution that estates would be burned only in exceptional circumstances, such as in the course of fighting or if German garrisons were located there. See Boradyn, ed., *Armia Krajowa na Nowogródczyźnie i Wileńszczyźnie (1942–1944) w świetle dokumentów sowieckich,* 25. For a comparison of the conflicting positions of the Polish and Communist underground in this regard in the Lublin region, see Marek Jan Chodakiewicz, *Between Nazis and Soviets: Occupation Politics in Poland, 1939*–1947 (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 190–91.