

EHRI Online Course in Holocaust Studies
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The Holocaust in Ukraine – German Mass Shootings
Translation: *B07 Mikhl Tanklevski in the Soviet Yiddish-Language Press (5 April 1943)*

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The Holocaust in Kiev

Told by one of the survivors, Mikhael Tanklevski

An old man of medium height came to the Jewish anti-fascist committee and introduced himself

- Tanklevski, Mikhael is my name. I first arrived last month from the other side, from the occupied Ukraine. For almost 19 months I remained among the murderers, made my way 1900 km by foot. Now I am travelling to Alma Ata, to where my family fled. I stopped for a day in Kuybyshev to tell the Jewish anti-fascist committee about the German murder of the Jews, so the world should know. Perhaps the world does not know so much...

The Living Envied the Dead

When the new arrival did not address us in Yiddish, it did not occur to us that he is a Jew. Rather he looked like a Ukrainian peasant from deep in Vohlyn. He appeared to be in his 50s. On his left cheek was a deep, as yet unhealed, gash.

- I am from Kiev – he related, - born and raised there. A railway employee. My father, Yosef, also worked his whole life on the railway. We lived on Podol, Verkhniy Val 13.

He remained silent for a moment.

- It's very difficult for me to talk [about it] – he said after a short while, - the wound is still fresh. But I came straight to you, I will be strong. And Mikhael Tanklevski told us the following:

- Nine days before the bandits seized Kiev, I sent my family, my wife and three children, to Bryansk. I myself, my brothers and sisters remained in the city, because our father, aged 72, was bedridden. On September 17th, when the Germans were already nearing the city, my deathly-ill father rose from his bed and I went with him by foot to Darnytsia. There we met hundreds of Jewish families who had not succeeded in fleeing. Only two days later the Germans already arrived in Darnytsia. All the Jews to be found therein were herded to a field, fenced in on all sides with barbed wire. Along with us, many prisoners, severely wounded Red Army soldiers and non-combatant citizens were also driven to that place.

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On the morning of the second day, September 20th, all the Jews, and even some Christians if they looked like Jews, were taken out of the camp, stripped naked and ordered to dig their own graves. Before our very eyes, the murderers shot them with automatic weapons. Among those killed was my 72 year old father. I stayed alive only because, so it seems, I don't look like a Jew. In truth, my life then was not agreeable.

What can I tell you! The heavens split with the cries of the mothers, the weeping of children, thrown still living into the open graves. Many of us who found ourselves imprisoned in the camp went out of our minds, witnessing the terrible slaughter.

Six successive days the pain of the prisoners of war in the Darnytsia camp lasted, although for the most part those in the camp were non-combatant Soviet citizens. In that week we were only once given food: a slice of bread, black as the earth, and a piece of herring. Dozens died of hunger and thirst every day. No one collected the dead. We, the living, envied the dead. I, together with two Russian friends, talked about escaping. On one occasion, by night we crawled under the barbed wire fence and fled. The fascist guard opened fire on us. Both of my friends were killed. By chance I survived. I was dressed, as all in the camp, in only my underclothes, barefoot. A living corpse. Making my way through back yards and gardens I managed to reach Kiev.

The Slaughter in the Lukianov Cemetery

My good acquaintance, the Russian worker with, B., lived on Yudovska Street. He took me in, as his own, gave me food, clothes and told me what was happening in the city. "Khreshchatyk is destroyed, all that remains is one wall – the home of what was once the Parliament. The fascists set on fire Nikolaev and **Proreznaya** streets. Afterwards, as the partisans isolated the Hotel Continental, where many Germans were to be found, people were hung in all the city's streets.

In the morning of a day at the end of September, the city rang out with an order from the German commander: over the course of three days all the city's Jews must gather in Lukianov, in the area of the Jewish cemetery.

For three days Kiev was in a state of terror. I was standing in a back courtyard on **Koscielna** Street and saw with my own eyes how thousands and thousands of Jews – old men, women, children, sick from the hospital, dragged themselves on their last journey from the city to the cemetery. My brother Leyb walked together with the dreadful funeral procession, his wife Riva with her twins in her arms. Her blind father – our relative by marriage, Shapiro.

Many Russian and Ukrainian neighbors and friends accompanied the Jews. Their eyes were swollen from tears, their faces black, they were only allowed to go as far as **Vladimir Bergl** and there they were stopped. Meanwhile the Jews were urged onwards. In the Lukianov cemetery the Jews were made to undress to their shirts and driven to the deep Lukianov ditch. On the edge they shot at them with machine guns. Over the course of three days 56 thousand Jews were murdered. Those not hit by a bullet and the wounded were buried

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alive. The deep ditch became full. For three days the shooting the shots floated from Lukianov; the muffled cries of the dying. Three days...

On 30th September, in the evening, a new order was published. Whoever had hidden a Jew would be shot. Whoever informed on a Jew would receive a payment of 100 Deutschmarks. As I later found out, many Russians and Ukrainians hid Jewish children. All over the city there was a series of searches. The fascists did not omit even one house.

In the Hell of Kirillovka

It became dangerous to stay for long in Kiev. In the first days of October I left my home town and began wandering. On the way, not far from Kiev, a German patrol stopped me and demanded to see my documents. I had none.

- You are a partisan! – he cried out and began to beat me with murderous blows, afterwards he undressed me and took me to the commander. There I was beaten again and, mutilated, sent back to Kiev to the concentration camp in **Kirillovka**. In the camp were POWs and non-combatant citizens, even peasants with children.

It began to rain, the first autumn rains. The whole day long we were soaked through, outside. By night they drove all of us into the barracks. Into each barrack, which could fit 100 people, they crammed between 500 and 600. We stood head to head. Every day more and more new parties were brought to the camp. And as there was no longer any room, the Germans always opened fire with their guns on the foremost rows. What happened then, you can imagine for yourselves. People bashed into each others' heads. The foremost pushed those at the back, stabbing them to death. Under every living person were to be found dozens, shot and squashed. No one took away the dead, all mixed together....

On October 10th and 11th they selected a large group of people from the camp. I was also among those chosen. We were driven to the Lukianov ditch. We were left standing there, shaking. From under the fresh earth ran bloody streams. The blood of the thousands of murdered Jews flowed, fermented by the rain, crying out from under the earth. I was grey that morning, looking at the dreadful picture.

- Cover the accursed Jewish blood! – the officer ordered us.

Two days and nights in succession we worked. I begged for death, all the time becoming weaker, but my friends gave me courage and I worked on.

The Suffering of Ukraine

For the entire winter we were kept in the camp under the open sky. In the course of the winter thousands died from cold, from hunger and disease. Those who remained alive were sent at the beginning of spring to work in villages. At that time I sprouted a big grey beard

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and everyone called me "grandfather", although I was only 32 years old. In the village I worked hard and bitterly. After laboring for a couple of months, I asked the official for permission to go home. I gave the name of a nearby village. I did the same in the second village: asking that they let me go on further "homewards". In this way I wandered over the tortured Ukrainian soil. I had a document in the name of Ivan Alekseievitsh Tsinzo. I found it on the way, on the body of a murdered peasant.

I endured the sufferings of the village populations. The Germans looted and plundered. The young people were sent to Germany for penal labor. For the slightest "crime" people were hung. In almost all the villages I saw hangings.

At the end of the following January, having travelled 1900 km on foot, I arrived in a village not far from Stary-Oskol. In order to stay overnight, I was required to report to the official. At the official's I met a few drunken German officers.

- A partisan?! – and like wild animals they fell on me. You see the cut on my cheek? That is a reminder of that night.

- Shoot! The officer commanded, and bloodied I was thrown into a wet, dark cellar, where a few peasants were.

The next day our forces freed the village and saved us from certain death.

translated by Rebecca Wolpe