

A TERRIBLE DAY (SHMINI AZERET 1939)

by Nathan KLAR, Tel Aviv

Today an order was issued that the Jews could apply to the magistrate for unpaid work, and I went there too. On the way, I was stopped by several Gestapo officers, armed from head to toe.

I explained to the Germans that I had to report to the magistrate for the job. They said that they take me also to work – and that they will issue a confirmation on this. On the way, the Gestapo detained more Jews, among those arrested:

Podemski, Sender-Leib, Woptshe Kozak. Moshe Mordechai Bibergal, Yechiel-Meir Frankel's brother-in-law, who lived with Yoel Sztajnfeld's neighbors, Beile the wigmaker's grandson, Hirszburg, who was a 14-year-old

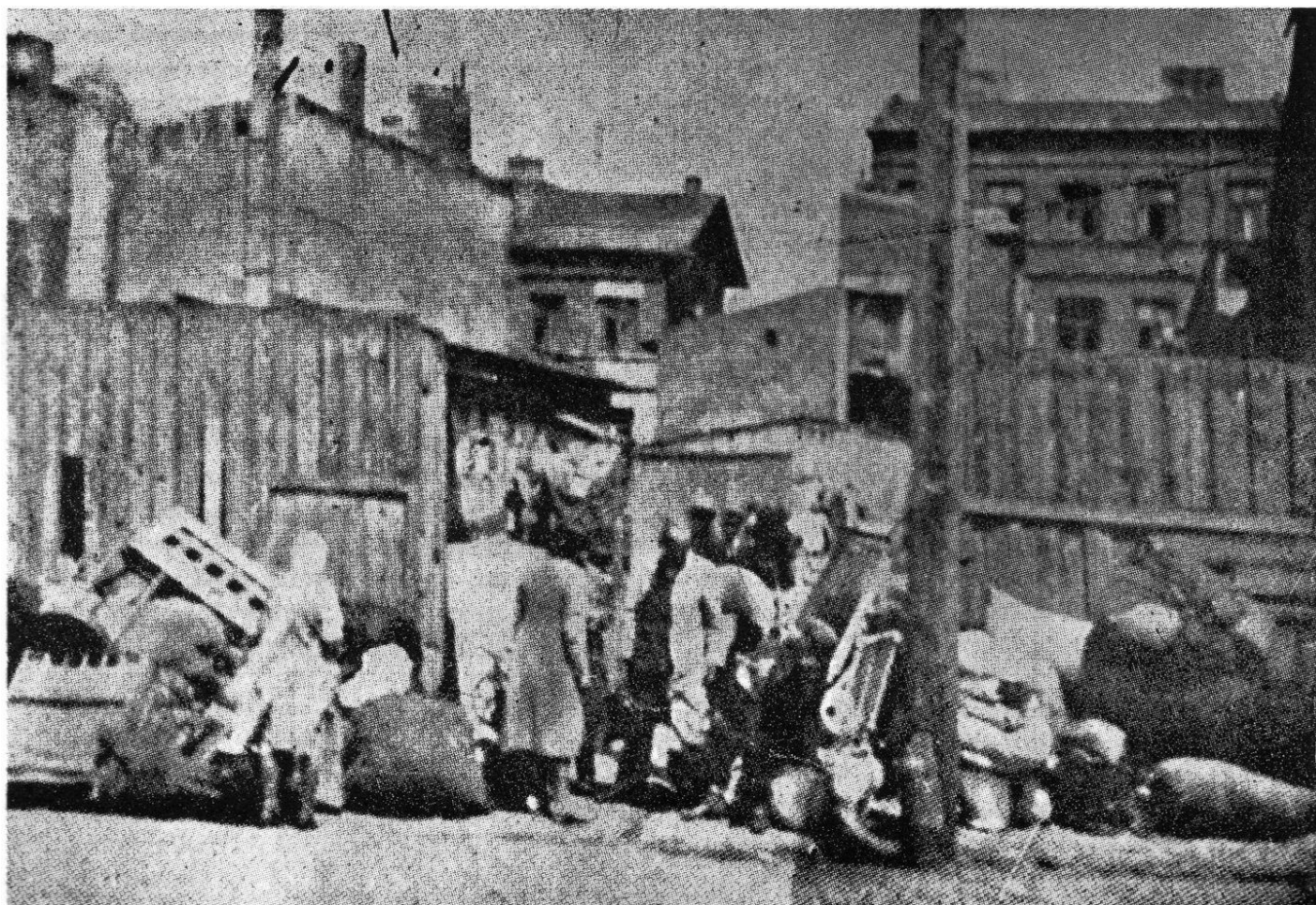
boy, and other Jews, whose name I no longer remember. Together we were with about twenty men.

We were taken to a German van. When we got there, the real hell began for us.

Up to ten armed Hitlerites were already on the scene, already waiting for us.

The eldest of them gave us a whole sermon, that we Jews are guilty of everything, we killed the German officers who were buried in the cemetery... Torture could not be avoided.

The Jews with beards endured terrible suffering. The elder Gestapo man walked among us with a knife and cut off the beard, together with the flesh... Then they



Deportation to the ghetto

demanded that they eat the beard, under threat of a revolver.

After that, an order came to undress half-naked, and we were given murderous blows until we bled. Anyone who did not show up quickly was stripped of his clothes.

The fourteen-year-old boy Hirsberg was ordered to remove his coat by the bandits. He had to pick up large stones, lay them on the coat, tie the corners together and lift them up on his shoulders. When the garment tore to pieces due to the heavy load and he did not manage to lift the stones, he was fatally beaten with an iron rod, until he fell and lost consciousness.

Then the elder of the Hitlerite barbarians ordered the boy to be thrown into the pit, from which the German officers had been exhumed.

Some Jews risked their lives, dragged the boy out of the pit, revived him – until he regained consciousness.

Our task was to excavate the German officers who fell during the great battles behind Kutno in September 1939.

I have just told how we were tortured in the presence of civilian Germans – residents of our city, headed by Keiler Wagner who is familiar to every inhabitant of our city; he lived on the highway, not far from hospital.

The elder of the Gestapo warned us that we Jews wanted this. War, we have. Guilty in everything and everyone. Therefore, he gives us half an hour and if we refuse a confession, then we will be shot. He ended his threats in this way:

— You dirty Jews need to take the place of our German comrades in the graves, understand!

One of ours, Podemski, suddenly responded:

— Not all...

For his "Not all", the Jew got a terrible blow. Then, Keiler Wagner came out and declared that all Jews understood well what was being said to them in German. Besides, he translated it to us into Polish.

We, the detained Jews, worked to exhume the shot German officers until six in the evening. It was curfew time, when people were not allowed to show up on the street.

At that moment, a German officer, an elderly, big man, came riding a horse and asked why we were so beaten to blood.

The elder Gestapo officer replied that the Jews, the pigs, did not want to work.

The incoming officer said:

— I do not believe that the Jews, under the guard of your arms, should refuse to work, this is not possible...

Finally, he asked, how long have the Jews to work here?

— Another hour, the Gestapo man responded.

The officer issued an injunction:

— After completing the work, they will immediately go home.

And he departed.

It did not take more than five minutes and the senior officer returned and ordered us to form a column of two. Then he took us alone, each to his own home, ordering us to present ourselves tomorrow for work.

None of us showed up for work anymore...