

## KUTNERS IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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translated from the Hebrew by Thia Persoff z"l

Many of the Kutner Jewish youths were drafted, and participated in the various fronts during the Second World War against the Nazi enemy. This was a blitz war. The German army conquered cities and countries one after the other, and, in the first days already, stood at the gates of Poland's capital – Warsaw. Even then, the Jews envisioned the full significance of the Nazi invasion, and what it brought with it for the Jews of Poland in the cities and towns.

Kutno, situated on the railroad junction that connects east and west Poland, was useful as an important target for the invading Nazis. They bombed Kutno's train station in the first days of the war, and in that bombing fell the first casualties of Kutno.



Group of Jewish soldiers in the Polish army in 1939. All perished.

Many Kutners served in the army unit that fought near the town of Łowicz and the Bzura River. The Germans assaulted this town fiercely and bombed it day and night.

The Polish army was forced to retreat from the German tanks, and in the battle the Kutners died a heroic death: Pinchas Lajchman, Meir Fast, Abraham Stuczyński, Abraham Sztift, Buki, Lipski, and Bibergal.

In the defense of Warsaw, the capital, many of the young Kutners were distinguished by their heroism. They knew and understood well the meaning of the German invasion for the Jewish masses, and fought like lions to defend the Polish capital. However, it is well-known that Warsaw's fate was a bitter one, and much bitterer was that of Warsaw's Jews, who, a few years later, were annihilated and destroyed by hunger, plagues, murder, and extermination camps. Only the remnants of Warsaw's Jews raised the flag of revolt against the German murderers, and did not submit like sheep to the slaughter.

However, after the front collapsed and the Germans took control, the Kutners started joining the partisan troops that operated in the forests. Others decided to wander east, towards Russia, looking for sanctuary from the Nazi murderer. Over there they joined the Red Army or troops of partisans that operated in the Russian forests, and later joined the Polish army under the leadership of General Anders, and the Polish army's first division – named after

Kościuszko – which was organized in the USSR. In the Red Army, too, Kutners were successful in rising up in the Russian army's ladder of officers' cadre, thanks to their exemplary sacrifice and zeal in their war against the annihilators of their people. But some of those Kutners were not lucky to see the Nazi animal's defeat and destruction, because they fell in the battles.

And these are the Kutners who fought on the various fronts against the Nazi enemy:

*Yeshayahu Altman* – Fought on the Warsaw front as an officer in the infantry. Today he is a teacher in a Haifa high school.

*David Aspirstajn* – A graduate of "Am HaSefer" school, a trainee in "HaShomer HaZair", fought in the Polish army on the Warsaw front as a physician.

*Epszajn* – Was enlisted in the British army and served in the Jewish Brigade that fought in Italy and Germany.

*Mendel Erdberg* – A *Beitar* trainee. Arrived in Israel through "illegal immigration". Enlisted in the British army, and was taken prisoner in the battle of Greece in 1941. After the war, he took part in the defense of Tel-Aviv, and the War of Independence.

*Bibergal* – Was born in 1912. At the start of the war, he was recruited to the army, and took part on the front on the Bzura River, where he died a hero's death.

*Abraham Benet* – Born in 1931. Was a *Beitar* trainee, and one of the towns' young artists. He fell during the defense of Kutno.

*Menashe Grinbaum* – Born in 1900. Fought on the Warsaw front, was mortally wounded, and died in hospital.

*Fishel Grinbaum* – Born in 1900. Fought on the Łowicz and the Warsaw fronts. Was taken prisoner-of-war by the Germans, He escaped and returned to Kutno. Later he was killed in Chełmno with the rest of his congregation.

*Tuvia Hirsberg* – Born in 1917. A *Beitar* trainee. Was killed with Abraham Benet during the bombardment of Kutno at the start of the war.

*Efraim Wajchselfisz* – Son of Moshe, a *Beitar* trainee. Was recruited to the defense of Warsaw. Escaped to Russia and enlisted in the Red Army where he fought with the rank of officer, and was sent as an officer to organize the first division of Anders' Army. He was badly wounded in the fighting in Lenino, on the Belarus front. After the liberation, he was appointed by the Polish army to be the military governor of Lublin. There he organized the surviving Jewish youth refugees, and after he met the soldiers of the Jewish fighting unit, he organized the escape [of Jewish refugees] in Poland – Austria – Italy.

*Shmuel Wajchselfisz* – Born on the 9<sup>th</sup> of Av, 1919 in the town of Kutno, to a distinguished family of his father Reb Israel Moshe and his mother Tamar. In his youth, he studied at the "Am HaSefer" high school, followed by studying in Łódź's "Broda" high school. He was active in *Beitar* from early youth.

The start of the war finds him and his younger brother Efraim, on their way to Israel. However, just as they arrived at Zalizhchyky, on the Rumanian border, they were forced to return to Warsaw. After a short time, he left with a group of friends from *Beitar* towards Russia. It was quite hard adjusting to the regimented way of life in Russia, but in spite of it, he excelled in his job as an agro-technician on a soviet farm, and even received a prize for his work. After the German attack on the USSR, he volunteered to the Red Army and fought in the battle of Stalingrad with the rank of an officer. As an officer in the unit, Sh. Wajchselfisz defended a tractor factory and freed the approach to the Volga River.

As an officer in the Red Army, he took part in the liberation of Poland, and freed town after town, witnessing the destruction, ruins, and death spread by the Nazi animals during their rule. In 1945, he was discharged from the Red Army, and as a Polish citizen returned to Poland where he met his only surviving brother – the only one who remained of his family – wounded and serving as an officer in the Polish security services. Face to face with the great cemetery that was Poland, where all the members of his family had perished, as had all of Jewry, his decision was finalized that, as a Jew with national identity, he no longer had a place in that accursed country. He made his mind up to immigrate to Israel. In spite of all the difficulties, Shmuel crossed borders and arrived in Austria. There he organized groups of *Beitar* and preached them the doctrine of Jabotinsky "Teach your children how to shoot". After a skirmish with Nazis, where he let them feel his strong arm, Shmuel crossed the Italian border illegally and from there arrived in Cyprus. In the refugees' camps, too, he did not forget Jabotinsky's doctrine, and organized defense troops. His men dug a tunnel and escaped from the refugee camp. That group arrived in Israel at the start of the Independence War, and was immediately attached to the battalion #5 of the *Palmach*. Again, Shmuel was fighting on the front, but this time it was the front of Jerusalem. In spite of the fact that he had the rank of an officer, no one knew it, so he went to an officer's training course and passed it. Even in the Israel Defense Forces, he swiftly achieved the rank of a senior officer. After the Sinai operation, he was promoted to the rank of Major. He still serves in the IDF.

### **Pinchas (Pawel) Herszberg – A Partisan and Activist in the Breicha<sup>1</sup>**

He was born in Kutno in 1921. A graduate of "*Am HaSefer*" school and the Hebrew high school in Włocławek. In 1939, he escaped to Belarus where he taught in Baranowicze district. When the Germans entered in 1941, he escaped to the forest and was one of the first organizers of the partisan movement in the Naliboki forests. As a section commander, he took part in mining trains, blowing

up bridges, sabotaging communication ways, and eliminating German headquarters in the area's forests.

Since the beginning of 1944, he was the editor of an underground bulletin, which was mimeographed and distributed among all the partisan brigades in the area, and the villagers. In June of 1944, the partisan forces in the Naliboki forests joined with the Red Army's communication unit, and immediately he volunteered to the regular army. He took part in the battles, and with a rank of Major, he arrived with the Red Army at the entrance of the town of Sokoły, where he was seriously wounded in both legs.

With the repatriation, he returned to Poland and devoted two years to work with "*Aliyat HaNoar*"<sup>2</sup>. He headed the children's home in Łódź, through which hundreds of children out of monasteries, Polish homes, and the streets, had passed on their way to Israel.

Hundreds of his trainees are living today in Israel's kibbutzim, towns, and cities. With the last group of children, he arrived in France and from there by the ship "*Nachshon HaKastel*" to Cyprus. During the first cease-fire, he arrived in Israel where he was awarded with the "*Ot HaHaganah*"<sup>3</sup> for his work in the *Breicha* and the youth immigration to Israel. Since the day of his arrival in 1948 until now, he is serving as one of the security system's top officers.

*Abba Warszawczyk* – A *Beitar* trainee, as an Israeli citizen had volunteered to the British army and was captured by the Germans in the battle for Greece. Today he lives in the USA.

*Yehuda Moshe Widawski* – Took part in the defense of Warsaw. Together with his battalion, he was captured after Warsaw's surrender. He returned to Kutno and his fate was the same as all the members of his people.

*Zalman Zomer* – An activist in the Kutno trade union. Was recruited into the Polish army when in the USSR, took place in the battles, and was wounded. After the liberation, he immigrated to the USA. He visited Israel.

*Chaim Zakszewski* – A member of the Communist party. Was recruited to the Polish army and was promoted to an officer. He fell during a battle in 1942.

*Yeshayahu Taub* – A captain in the Polish army. Was captured by the Germans and was imprisoned up to the end of the war. After the liberation, he immigrated to Israel, and today he is a teacher in a high school.

*Eliezer Tyger* – A trainee of *Beitar*. He was conscripted into the Polish army in Russia, and took part in the conquest of Warsaw. Now he lives in the USA.

*Zvi (Hirsh) Kohn* – A trainee of *Beitar*. He was recruited into General Anders' Army in Russia, where he attained the rank of captain. He took part in the conquest of Berlin. Today he lives in the USA.

*Pinchas Lajchman* – Fell near Bzura.

*Shmuel ben Yaakov Falc*<sup>4</sup> – Was born in 1920 in Kutno. First, he studied in the high school there, and then in the high school in Włocławek. Since his youth, he was a member of the "*Maccabi*" organization, and one of its

<sup>1</sup> TN: The "*Breicha*" was an organization helping refugees to escape from Europe to Israel.

<sup>2</sup> TN: "*Aliyat HaNoar*" is the organization for youth immigration to Israel.

<sup>3</sup> TN: "*Ot HaHaganah*" is the medal of distinction from the "*Haganah*" forces.

<sup>4</sup> TN: AKA Shmuel (Stefan) Laron. See article on page 394 of the original book.

trainers in Kutno. He was wounded on the Warsaw front, and was moved to a hospital by the Germans. After returning to Kutno, he escaped to Russia and reached Lemberg. In Russia he was recruited to General Anders' Army, where he was attached to the air force and was transferred to England. He took part in the English bombing of the German cities until he was captured by the Germans in 1944.

After the end of the war, he received a grant from the British government, and returned there for extended studies. At the start of the Israel's Independence War, he immigrated so that he could take a part in it. He was recruited to the budding Israeli air force.

*Lipski* – Fell, while in the Polish Army, by the Bzura River.

*Getzel Moszkowicz* – Was recruited to the Polish army, and took part in the battles. He attained the rank of lieutenant.

*Abraham Stuczyński* – Fell in the battle for the town of Łowicz.

*Meir Fast* – Took part in a bayonet battle near Łowicz, and fell.

*Fishel Frizler* – Took part in the battle on Warsaw. After he was taken prisoner by the Germans, he escaped to Russia. There he joined the Red Army and fought in the Ukrainian front. He fell in the battle for Kiev.

*Herman Celemenski* – Was recruited in Russia to the Polish army. He took part in the battle for the liberation of Warsaw. Now he lives in Canada.

*David Pakulski* – Was born in Kutno in 1915, and was a trainee of the "*HaNoar HaZioni*" youth movement. He fought in the Red Army and was severely wounded in 1945 at the Koenigsberg front. He immigrated to Israel in 1957, and passed away in 1963.

*Michael Rasz* – Was a trainee of the "*HaShomer HaZair*" youth movement. When in Russia he was recruited to the Polish army, and fell in the battle for the Vistula River in 1944.

*Zvi Klinberg* – Was recruited to the Cavalry Force at the start of the Second World War, and took part in the battle near the city of Poznań. He fell defending the capital city Warsaw.

*Yitzhak Kenig* – When in Russia, he was recruited to the Polish army. He took part in various battles, and was liberated in 1945. Now he lives in the USA.

*Abraham Sztift* – Was recruited at the start of the World War. He fell, with Lipski, at the battle near the city of Łowicz.

*Zalman Kirsztajn* – Was recruited in 1939, and fell in the battle for the town of Żychlin.

*Freunt* – Was recruited to the Polish army of General Anders, and fought on the Italian front.

*Szpira* – Was recruited to the Polish army of General Anders, and fought on the Italian front.

*Michrowski*<sup>5</sup> – Was a *Beitar* trainee. He arrived in Israel via the "illegal immigration". As an Israeli, he enlisted in the British army. As a music composer, he, with his band, appeared on the various fronts to encourage the soldiers. He is well known as a composer in Israel and the world. He lives in the USA now.

*Nachman Falc* – Was a *Beitar* trainee in Israel and a member of the "*Irgun Zvai Leumi*" ("*Etzel*") party. Although under age, he enlisted in the British army, and fought with his unit under the Israeli flag. His unit was recognized as an Israeli unit under Israel's flag. He was severely wounded on the Italian front, and after much suffering and long medical treatment, he walked with crutches. When he returned to Israel, he presented himself at the "*Etzel*" headquarters and became one of its trainers. He took part in many underground skirmishes in spite of his disability. He fell during a skirmish on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Iyar when he went with a group of young men on a military attack, and did not return to the base. Their fate and where they fell is unknown until today.<sup>6</sup>

*Yaakov Ferenbach* – Took part in the Second World War as a soldier in the Jewish Brigade fighting in Italy.

*Yaakov Szwarc*<sup>7</sup> – Fought on the Warsaw front. Was a prisoner of war but managed to escape from captivity. He was active in "*Aliya Bet*" during 1946 and 1947.

*Yehoshua Fuks* – Was recruited in 1939 to the infantry of the Polish army. He took part in the battle near Kutno-Łowicz. Was a prisoner of war, but was caught when he tried to escape and was sent to the ghetto, where he was killed with his entire townspeople.

*Buki* – A trainee of *Beitar*. He was recruited to the army at the start of the war, and died a hero's death in a gun battle near the Bzura River.

*Wolf Nosal* – Was recruited to the army at the start of the war, and fell in the battle near Sochaczew, in the Warsaw district.

*Zalmanik Fast* – Was recruited in Russia to the Polish army of General Anders.

*Israel Fast* – Was recruited in Russia to the army of General Anders.

<sup>5</sup> TN: AKA Issachar Miron.

<sup>6</sup> TN: see article on page 315 of the original book, for more details.

<sup>7</sup> TN: see article on page 309 of the original book.