

From Mielec to Sobibór  
The Testimony of Eda Lichtman

This testimony was given at the legal proceedings in Hagen, West Germany and completed by Miriam Novitch at the Ghetto Fighters' House in 1965.

Following the common initiative of Judy Cohen & Ada Holtzman, the testimony was translated from Hebrew to English in January 2005. The translation was commissioned by an anonymous. It was edited by Ada Holtzman.

...In Dubienka, which is on the River Bug, they put us up in synagogues. The Jewish Council (Judenrat) sent us food and straw for bedding. Later they housed us in the homes of local families. After that, confinement and forced labor on farms. "Aryan" peasants and foremen grew rich at the expense of the Jewish slaves. And again the same acts of violence as in Mielec a group of Jews in prayer shawls was attacked and taken to one of the hills. There the prayer shawls were ripped off their backs and their prayer books torn from their hands: "Dance in front of us so we can enjoy ourselves!" The Jews did not adapt to the game. "We know them well, such fanatics! It will be a beautiful pyre!" No one returned from the hill alive...

Senior officers visited frequently, in the company of the "black ones" (Ukrainians, known as "Pizaks"). They would swoop down on the ghetto like locusts, plundering anything and everything that we still had, leaving dead and wounded behind them. A few Jewish families are hidden in one of the apartments. They throw a hand grenade into it, children's decapitated heads, pools of blood...

...And yet again, deportation to Hrubieszów. Again the road is scattered with corpses. Once again, the cruelty of the "black ones" knows no bounds. Children beg: "Master, kill me, leave my father alone!"...

Hrubieszów is surrounded by a barbed wire fence. There are watch towers at all four corners and armed guards with machine guns. "Down!" they yell. They shoot at the people who are crowded together. A deathly hush prevails. Parents silence their children. The evening gradually draws in.

Only when darkness falls are the ghetto inhabitants allowed to bring us bread and water. We spend the night in a filthy barrack. With dawn – on our way. Horse-drawn carts bring us to the railway station; where cars for transporting cattle are waiting for us. “You are going to the Ukraine,” we are told.

The convoy sets out. Very quickly thirst begins to plague us. Every so often the doors are opened and soldiers attack us. They are wearing German army uniforms, but they speak Ukrainian. They grab any valuables from our hands. They lop off fingers complete with rings. “In any case you do not need a thing,” they tell us.

We have lost all sense of time. Have we already arrived in the Ukraine? The locomotive lets out an earsplitting shriek. The train comes to an abrupt stop. We remain halted for a while and then the car sets off again. The doors open. The light blinds us. I read the writing on the sign: “S.S. Sonderkommando Sobibór.”

Facing us are officers and soldiers, on their shoulders or in their hands machine guns ready to shoot. I make out a large St. Bernard dog. “Hey, you over there,” one of the officers shouts, pointing at me, “what you do for a living?” “**I’m a qualified kindergarten teacher.**” The whole gang burst out laughing. “OK, you can do the washing for us!” They pull me and two other young girls – Bela Sobol and Sarka Kac from Dubienka, out of line. They take us into the camp and put us in a small barrack. In it, in a great mess, are clothes and moldy slices of bread. Who were the barrack’s previous residents, and where are they now?

Of the transport from Hrubieszów, 8,000 souls, three women remained in Sobibór. The only thing left of all the rest are heaps of clothes and shoes. Of those three, I am the only one to have survived.

The day we arrived in Sobibór two of the camp’s inmates, accompanied by a soldier, brought us two baskets full of dirty clothing: “Everything must be clean within two days”, says the soldier. The clothes are lice-infested. First they must be disinfected with Lysol. The water has to be pumped into heavy wooden buckets.

My first night in the camp. A nightmare. Cries rend the air, jerking me out of my plank-bed. I run to the door and open it slightly. The crack of a whip in my face. A deafening voice yells at me, "If I see you here again, I'll set my Barry on you!" It turns out that Oberwachmann Lachmann and his dog are out on an inspection patrol, but I only learn about this later.

And what is the meaning of the screams? The Ukrainian guards are raping the young girls before pushing them into the gas chambers.

The latrines are next to the barrack and the stench fills the room. The deportees, who have just arrived and are dying of thirst, call out in entreaty, "Water! water!" Sometimes one or two of them are allowed to fetch water. Michel the Volksdeutscher<sup>1</sup>) stands next to the well with a bayoneted rifle. He pushes the poor wretches towards the latrines: "Go on, pick it up – with your hands!" he tells them in German. He uses his bayoneted rifle to prod them towards the barbed wire. Malinovski the guardsman is waiting for them there. His face is scarred from smallpox. He straightens his hat, narrows his eyes slightly and aims his rifle at their heads. He never misses his target...

Michel is bullying one of the camp inmates, a boy called Shimon. He force him to run with a wheelbarrow full of sand. The boy runs, his tongue sticking out like an parched animal. Later Shimon took part in the uprising but was shot during the escape.

One day I took advantage of the slave-drivers' absence. I took a bucket of water and ran towards a group of deportees who had just arrived in the camp. Suddenly I felt as if my neck was being gripped as in a vise, as if someone was strangling me from behind. An SS man called Fritz Rechwald had used the handle of his whip to extricate me from the throng. "Achtung!" he roared at me. "You're lucky I'm on my own, but if I see you over there again..." It was indeed strictly forbidden to go up to the deportees who had just arrived in the camp.

The laundry was next to the barrack. One day I saw two people carrying a stretcher with a woman on it writhing in labor. A few minutes later, the newborn's wails were heard. Wagner was next to the new mother. He called Klatt, the Ukrainian guard, over to him. I saw Klatt go into the latrines

and throw in a package. They took the mother to Lager III. A few days later the baby's corpse was found floating in the drainage water...

One day a transport from Vienna arrived. The SS men picked themselves out three beautiful women, singers, and forced them to sing. When they grew tired of the singing, they shot them, executed them. One day three sixteen and seventeen year-old girls were selected from a transport that had arrived from Berlin – Berta, Lena and Ruth. Ruth, a brunette with beautiful eyes, became Paul Johannes Groth's mistress. Their lives as spoils did not last long. They were soon murdered in cold blood.

And once again a transport arrived from Western Europe. The transport's origin could be recognized from the deportees' appearance: they were properly dressed, and did not seem to be starved, unlike the deportees from Poland. They had rucksacks with them, nice suitcases. The Germans carried out their "selection" among them and chose a number of young men who were sent to the labor units in the Lublin district – to Sawin, Krychów and Osowa. A few months later they were brought back to the camp in a state of utter exhaustion. Eventually everybody was put to death.

Our hangmen were, Karl August Frenzel, Gustaw Wagner, Hermann Michel. The latter would stand on a table and address the transports on their arrival at the camp. Anton Getzinger, Otto Weiss, Paul Bredow, Karl Steubel, Paul Groth and Hubert Gomerski – they all lived in a villa which had such a poetic name – "The Swallow's Nest".

Müller, Kurt Richter, Johann Klier, Walter Nowak, Wolf Franz and his brother Josef Wolf, Buscher, Siegfried Graetschus, Schütt Hans-Heinz, Josef Vallaster, Unverhau Heibnrich, Erich Bauer – they lived in a house known as "To The Merry Flea".

Every SS man had his own way of killing people. When a new transport arrived, the whole company would come to the platform. Bredow would stride around among the deportees as if demented, looking for the girls and women and lashing out at them with his whip until the blood ran. Gomerski enjoyed hitting the deportees with a board studded with nails. Paul Groth and Kurt Bolender would take Barry with them. The dog would walk quietly by their side, but when his master turned to one of the people and asked,

“So you don’t want to work?”, Barry would launch himself at the person, biting the flesh, tearing at it and pulling off chunks of it.

The camp supervisor wore a cape and white gloves. He made his rounds of the camp accompanied by Barry the dog. He would make speeches about the good life awaiting those going to the Ukraine. “The conditions and the food there are better than here,” he would say. “Those who prove that they are hard workers will get special certificates, and then there will be family reunions as well...” We had to be careful not to convey our skepticism about what he was saying by the slightest movement or intimation.

SS Oberscharführer Erich Bauer, commandant of Lager III, used to observe the killing process through a glass window in the roof of the gas chambers. A short, stocky man, he was a known drinker who regularly overindulged. He would threaten us: “I’ll teach you a lesson!” He was never without his machine gun. His very appearance aroused nausea. The other SS men were well turned out and neat even during “work”. Bauer was different: he was always filthy and unkempt, with a stench of alcohol and chlorine emanating from him.

One day he came into the laundry. We were all very wary of him. “Carry on working!” he yelled. We continued with our work. “You’re working on the Sabbath, that makes you all Communists!” – he goaded us. One of the deportees from Sochaczew was bold enough to answer him back: “I’m a religious man,” he said, taking a Jewish prayer book, a siddur, out of his pocket, “but we’re forced to work.” “And what about you!” the German yelled, turning to Saba Zalc, “you work on the Sabbath as well?” The poor woman did not know what to reply. The Sochaczew man answered for her: “Our women aren’t required to pray; they only light the candles on the Sabbath Eve.” “So you light candles, do you?”, he continued to badger her. “I used to light, at my home,” Saba replied, taking courage and speaking up. “I hate all observant Jews. All lice-infested,” Bauer stated categorically.

In his room, he had a picture on the wall of himself and a picture of all of his family with the Führer. He also installed a drinks bar and gave orders for eggnog to be prepared for him. One day, when he came back from his “work”, he broke one of the bottles. “You’re going to clean that up for me with your tongue!” he yelled at one of the camp inmates, Berek Brand. Some of the drink collected in the cracks in the floor. The whole of Berek’s

face was filthy with blood from the broken glass.

Paul Groth also used to drink to excess. One day he ordered four of the camp inmates to carry him, seated on an easy chair, round the camp. He had great fun setting fire to pieces of paper and dropping them on our heads.

Herbert Floss, another one of the SS men, ordered a pair of boots from the shoemaker's shop. The shoemaker, Szaul Flajshaker from Kalisz, dared say to him that the nails he had put in the boots were not right and asked him to return them. When Floss put one of his feet on the stool in order for one of the shoemaker's assistants to shine his boot, he replied, "Nothing that comes in here will ever leave again!" Everybody understood exactly what he meant.

Szaul Sztark was put in charge of the geese. He would fatten them with balls made of flour soaked in water and every day he would take them out to the meadow. If one of the geese did not put on enough meat and fat, the whip would rain down lashes on Szaul Sztark's back. Now, after a short illness one of the geese died. Szaul paid for this with his life. Frenzel, Wagner, Weiss and Bredow attacked him with their whips. When he managed to extricate himself from their clutches and run down the camp paths, the entire group ran after him, raining merciless blows on his back. "Leibl, Leibl, gedenk, nem nekume!" (Leibl, Leibl, remember to revenge!) Szaul Sztark cried out, referring to his son: "Comrades, revenge, revenge!" Those were his last words.

We were tortured by hunger. A boy, thirteen or so, one of the camp inmates, happened to find a tin of sardines. Frenzel was passing by and saw him. "What, a theft here?!" He gathered everybody in the camp around the "criminal," whom he liquidated by shooting him with his pistol. "That will be the end of anyone who dares to touch anything!" he yelled.

The SS men would pick out artists and painters from the transports and order them to paint pictures for them to decorate the walls of their rooms or the clubhouse. Their commissions included a huge portrait of the Führer, their own likenesses, and enlargements of postcards. On the whole they had a preference for romantic landscapes. They sent some of the pictures

to their families in Germany. The painters were ordered to put up various signs: "Hairdressing Salon," "Clubhouse" ("Casino"). When their work was done, the artists were sent to the gas chambers.

Sadistic "gymnastic exercises" used to give them great pleasure. In the rain, in the snow – "jump like a frog!" "run quickly!", "lie down on your front!", "climb!". They enjoyed lashing us with their whips while we ran. When they tired, they handed us over to Taras, a Ukrainian Wachmann, who was no less cruel than them.

After attempts at escaping, the "gymnastic exercises" became more frequent. At first they would take place once a day, and then twice a day, morning and evening. Scharführer Gomerski took great pleasure in hitting us with a wooden board or a hammer.

Oberscharführer Schultz and Karl Müller would go out with the Commando to cut down trees in the forest. On the way, for fun and gratification, Müller would use his ax to inflict injuries on some of our people. They were bleeding. Then they would have trouble cutting down the trees, and he handed them over to Schultz. Even though the latter was no novice, he shot them with his pistol, never missing his target.

Karl Müller was meticulous in his clothing. "You will bring me my clothes every evening. and make sure that they are properly ironed," he ordered me. I would bring him his underwear together with Ester Brinberg, or with Saba Zalc. When we entered the room, we would stand to attention. Every evening he would ask us the selfsame question, instantly answering it himself: "What is the most dreadful animal in the world? What, you don't know? It is the man!"

One day, after evening roll-call (Appell), Otto Weiss the SS man gave orders for a long wooden chest to be brought to him. He directed one of the camp inmates to don a black silk kaftan and a shtreimel<sup>2</sup>), and to lie down full length in the chest. Weiss dropped the lid and broke into song, "I'm a Jew with a long snout!" Weiss half-opened the chest lid and ordered the prostate man to salute those who had gathered and repeat his words. Then he continued, "Beloved God, hearken to our song, stop up the Jews' voices so that mankind will have relief. Amen!" The SS men sang the song in a chorus. They ordered the "Hassid"<sup>3</sup>) to sway back and forth as if praying,

and made us say “amen” over and over again. They had such a good time.

One day, they took a Jew who had just arrived from the platform. He had black hair and swarthy skin. The SS immediately dubbed him “der Neger” (the Negro). Wagner ordered him to sing. The fellow improvised in Yiddish, looking at the wonderful pine forest that surrounded the camp:

“Vi lustig ist de unser lebn,  
Man tut unz tsu essen gebn,  
Vi lustig ist im grynem vald  
Vo ich mich ofhalt...”

(How wonderful our life here is,  
Here they give us food;  
How wonderful it is for me in the green forest,  
Where I am!)

Wagner liked the song. He instructed us to learn it by heart and to sing it after roll-call. This “Negro”, a cobbler from Kalisz, was a really decent fellow, a soul-mate to us all. He had left his wife and children behind in Kalisz, and the whole time he hoped that they had managed to survive and that the day would come when he would see them. He devoted himself heart and soul to planning the revolt. I remember that on the night of October 13-14, when we were agreeing among ourselves the final details of the preparations for the revolt, he said, “Let us swear to fight, all of us as one man, so that the young people can savor the taste of freedom.” Then he fell to his knees and kissed the ground. We all kneeled and in our hearts took an oath of allegiance.

He was part of the group that was assigned to attack the armory. While he was handing the guns over to the insurgents, he was shot by the Volksdeutsche Schreiber. In exchanges of fire, Schreiber himself was shot by Szaul Flajshaker from Kalisz.

Szaul Flajshaker was also a hero, a daring and courageous man. Wagner ordered him to administer 25 lashes to a young camp inmate who had been caught stealing butter. He was bold enough to refuse, saying that he did not know how to administer a lashing. At which point Wagner himself delivered the 25 lashes to him in person. He withstood the whipping with fortitude, just counting the blows under his breath, one by one. The young man also

received his quota.

One day, during the last months of the winter of 1943, the Germans got worked up and started running around like mice on some sort of drug. The rumor spread round the camp that Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler in person was going to make a visit to Sobibór. All kinds of junk began to build up outside the warehouse: old children's baby carriages, broken items of kitchenware, thermos flasks and so on. All of this disappeared, and the place was cleaned up with feverish haste. Next came a number of trucks laden with sand, which was dumped and smoothed out, and then long planks were laid on top of the sand. This was intended as an improvised landing strip for the Reichsführer's private plane.

The day before the visit, a group of young men and women was brought to the camp. They had been selected from one of the transports. The Germans locked everyone in the camp in the barracks under lock and key. The camp commandant and SS officers Johann Niemann, Gustav Franz Wagner and others welcomed the distinguished guest and his entourage and gave them a conducted tour of Lager I and Lager II. Then they went to Lager III. The young inmates were ordered to shave and then were taken to Lager III, to the gas chambers. Himmler and the members of his entourage followed closely the killing and the incineration to ashes of the bodies of those who had been killed. We learned about this from the Ukrainian guard unit.

A lavish reception awaited the guests in the clubhouse. It was my job to bring flowers to the clubhouse to decorate the tables. The wine flowed like water and there was endless heel-clicking accompanied by salutations of "Heil." The clubhouse was a well-kept place with terraces, flowerbeds, a small barber shop, a bathroom, lavatories, and a sports field. It appeared that the Reichsführer was very pleased with what he saw. We learned shortly afterwards that the camp's commanding officers had been given promotions.

A brigade of Wehrmacht soldiers came to the camp. They brought a great number of chests and crates with them. All of the camp's environs were mined. A deep ditch was dug and filled with water, and the barbed wire fence was electrified.

Gustav Wagner supervised the carrying out of the works. He would patrol the camp up and down without a moment's respite. Once he caught Riwka red-handed. She fell asleep during work. Her punishment: 25 lashes. Riwka was 13.

One day a transport arrived accompanied by a guard unit of officers and soldiers. The soldiers from the guard unit wanted to patrol the camp, but their wish was denied. Categorically forbidden. They returned to their posts and a few days later came back, accompanying another transport. This time they were invited to the clubhouse. There, they were welcomed by Niemann, Wagner, Schwarz and their wives. They were regaled with a sumptuous repast with drinks in abundance. Next they were shown "how the camp personnel work quietly and calmly." At the end of the tour of the camp, they were taken to the warehouse and given bottles of perfume and the like as mementoes. When they wanted to pay, Wagner refused to accept anything from them: "Forget it, I'll take care of things." Everyone left the warehouse happy.

What did the warehouses not contain? They were full of all good things: clothing, expensive furs, musical instruments, surgical instruments, shoes in all sizes and of all kinds, and so on and so forth.

The gold and jewelry were kept in the camp commander's offices, in a specially installed room housing chests and crates as if in a gigantic store, containing gold ingots, bracelets, brooches, etc. One of the camp inmates, as naked as the day he was born, was commanded to sort the spoils under the watchful eye of the SS man Steubel. A German goldsmith would come to check the items, after which everything was sealed in armor-plated black chests and sent straight to Berlin by automobile.

In the barrack housing the camp commander's offices, there lived Steubel, Schütt, Floss, Becher, Kurt Bolender and Dr. Blaurock, a chemist who "worked" in Lager III.

A large number of pure bred horses were housed in the most wonderfully cared for stable. Maks, a lad aged about thirteen, inmate, was appointed to look after the horses and swat the flies that bothered them. One day

Frenzel decided that Maks was not doing his work properly. He gave him a whipping. Becker, Nowak, Groth and Klatt joined in the lashing. The lad started to run, with the Germans in hot pursuit. The chase lasted about half an hour, till Maks fell to the ground, unconscious. He never recovered. For a while he continued to work in the stable, but each time he saw a German he would shake uncontrollably, waving his arms around as if trying to keep something away from his face. At night he would cry like an injured animal. One day he was shot to death.

At first the camp was not mined, and two of the inmates tried to dig a tunnel under the barbed wire fence and escape.

A vigorous investigation was carried out in the morning of all those in the camp. Every tenth person was commanded to step out of line. Each of them received 25 lashes. The Ukrainian “Wachmänner” or guards administered the whippings. The poor wretches struggled and our hearts bled. Some of them received more than 25 lashes – fifty or even a hundred – because they made a mistake counting the first 25 lashes. Each of them had to count the lashes out loud, and if he made a mistake – the whipping started again. The inmates who were lashed could barely stand up. The guards surrounded them and took them to Lager III. Suddenly the figure of a woman running after them could be seen. This was a young singer who was an inmate of the camp. She did not want to depart from her beloved one. She was carrying their little five-year-old son with her, and shouting at the SS guards, “You loathsome murderers!”

By chance, the SS man Karl Frenzel found out that Leibl Flajszer, a boy aged thirteen or so who worked in the clothing shed, had a stammer.

“Hey, you, what is your name?” he would bellow at the boy when he came into the shed. The boy was incapable of answering immediately. Frenzl had his fun. He continued, “What did you have to eat today?” The boy tried to answer him. “Faster, you mangy dog!” the SS man would shriek. He called his comrades to come in as well, enjoying the spectacle greatly. He rewarded Leibl for the pleasure by throwing him from time to time a hard-boiled egg or a sandwich. Leibl Flajszer died in the uprising.

Berek Lichtman, a handsome youth not yet fifteen years old, was brought to Sobibór together with his family but was the only one to survive. Despite

the horrors of camp life, he was always calm and serene. At first he worked in the clothing store, then in the kitchen, and finally in the shoemaker's shop. During the uprising when we killed Josef Vallaster, he helped us to bury the body and hide the traces of blood incredibly quickly. In the attack on the armory, he grabbed a rifle and began shooting at the Wachmänner, to provide cover for a number of the insurgents to escape. He fell in the battle.

Leibl Dreszer, a boy of about 13 years of age, played an important role in preparing the revolt as well as in the actual uprising. He had to go to the officers and invite them to come to the workshops at H-hour, in order to try on the clothes and footwear that they had ordered.

First he went to Niemann and reminded him that he was expected in the tailor's shop. Niemann mounted his white horse and set out for the workshops. Leibl ran after him. After Niemann dismounted, tying his horse up near the door, Leibl undid the reins and took it to the stables. This was because we were expecting a few more "guests" and if the horse had still been outside while its master had disappeared, this would have given rise to suspicions.

Leibl was shot in the forest while escaping.

Some of the camp inmates fell ill, but because it was known that invalids had no right to exist, they would go out to work even when suffering the ravages of typhoid fever or dysentery. Szimon Rabinowicz found a kerosene fuelled cooking stove in the camp together with the fuel for a flame. He also managed to find a little rice that he would cook on the stove and bring to the sick. In this way he really saved their lives. Otto Weiss, an SS man, caught him red-handed bringing the curative dish to his patients. Despite the lashing Szimon received, he was not deterred and continued with his old ways.

Once Frenzel came into the barrack just as Szimon was putting the pot on the flame. Szimon hastily hid the pot and put his foot on the burning stove in order to extinguish it. For a long time, his foot was covered with serious burns. Nevertheless, he continued to help his brethren in trouble. He played an active role in the revolt, but was shot while escaping.

One day a Ukrainian called Koshvadski brought me the white uniform of his master, Oberwachmann Lachmann, a known drunk, and told me, "I'll come to pick up the suit tomorrow at five, and it had better be clean by then!" "By five tomorrow," I answered him, "the uniform won't be dry!" "How dare you argue with a member of the guard!" he snarled, bringing his stick down on my hand, which swelled up and became distended. But apparently Koshvadski did not think that one blow was enough, and was about to carry on beating me. Icchak held on to his arm with all his strength, saying, "Aren't you ashamed to hit a woman who works so hard?" The Ukrainian left the barrack. He stopped hitting women.

In Lager I there was a barrack with a sign that said "Infirmary." It could be seen from the station, and everybody who came through the gates of Sobibór could read the wording on the sign. But the infirmary was intended only for the Germans. There was also a dental clinic in the camp, where for a while Dr. Bresler from Płock worked, together with two assistants, from Czechoslovakia, Kurt and Berta. The dentist and his assistants put their lives at risk by providing us with medication and treating us in secret.

The sight of the suffering of the children in Sobibór was heartbreaking. From the laundry window I saw a group of camp inmates being driven in the direction of Lager III. Snow covered the path. One boy was walking on his own. His trousers fell down, and he could not catch up with the rest. A dog appeared out of nowhere, approached the boy – but did him no harm. Finally the Ukrainian guard walking at the end of the procession grabbed the child and dragged him toward the others walking to their deaths. In the transports that arrived in the camp in winter there were also children who were frozen by the cold: Wagner, with a cigarette in his mouth, would pick up their congealed bodies and toss them as if they were birds or dead animals. Sometimes we would hear a wail or crying – not all of them had frozen to death.

The women played an active role in the revolt in Sobibór. I was also one of those who were introduced to its secrets. I knew the general outline of the plan for the revolt: a) To get the SS men to come to the workshops and to kill them there at the designated time; b) To find the armory and distribute the arms to those who knew how to use them; c) To disconnect the

electricity supply and the telephone wires; d) To disable the vehicles parked in the camp so they would be unable to use them to pursue the insurgents; d) Previously agreed camp inmates – wearing the uniforms of the SS men to be killed – would lead the commando companies outside the camp (these companies would sometimes pass through the camp's gates at unconventional times in order to pick mushrooms or grain).

The women who worked in the laundry were assigned the task of stealing as many rifle bullets as possible from the houses where the SS personnel lived. We found rifle bullets in the Germans' uniform pockets or in their desk drawers. Sarka Kac, Helka Lubartowska, Ester Grynbaum, Zelda Mec, Saba Zalc, I and other women performed our duties. We handed our booty over to the shoemaker's shop which had installed a safe hiding place in their barrack for arms and ammunition.

We also had to prepare clean underwear and clothing for the insurgents. Some of those in the camp had to lay their hands on money and valuables that the escapees could use in order to buy food.

On the eve of October 14, Ester wept, "Why did I forsake my family? Why did not I stay with them, in order to die with them? Tomorrow, we will no longer be in this world. The sun will rise and set again, the flowers will bloom and fade – and we won't be here." "We have nothing to lose, and what is there that we will miss in the world in which we are living," Helka Lubartowska cut her short. "There still echoes in my head the sound of weeping of my little brother and sisters that I heard when we were separated on the platform." And little Rosa from Stanislaw added, "Come what may – tomorrow perhaps we will be free! Can our lives here be called life?!" "Last night I dreamed," said Ester Torner, "that my mother brought me a live, flapping fish. That's a good sign!" While Saba Zalc from Lublin complained, "I've not had a single good day in my entire life; nothing but hunger, suffering and death." And Sala from Lwow brought the conversation to an end, saying decisively, "That will do, we've done enough talking, we have to get ready for tomorrow."

The commando companies go out to work. A new day begins, 14 October, 1943...

The revolt began at 4 in the afternoon. Niemann the SS officer made a round of the camp on a carriage drawn by two horses; then he rode the white horse to the barrack housing the tailor's shop, where he was killed. Other SS men who were killed included Greaetschutz, Klatt, Wolf and others.

Swarc who was standing next to the generator, disconnected the power and the telephone line. Then we found out that the large automobiles were missing from the garage; we were sure that a number of the SS men were outside the camp. This was something that we had not anticipated when we planned the revolt.

The young ones in our group distributed clean clothing, money and gold coins to everybody in order to buy food if the uprising succeeded.

Szlomo Szmajzner's work was fixing the stoves in the Ukrainian guard unit's barracks. One by one he smuggled rifles out of there which had been concealed in the stoves' chimneys. Suddenly Wachmann Reil appeared on a bicycle, screaming in German, "Where are my rifles?" He was killed by axe blow. The SS man Steubel was shot near the commandant offices. One of the guard unit men rushed to the clubhouse where Frenzel was at the time, yelling, "Ein Deutscher kaputt!" ("A German's been killed!"). Frenzel grabbed his machine gun and ran to the entrance to the camp. Soldiers in the Ukrainian guard unit began shooting from the watch towers.

We waited for the signal. In the corner of the room I saw Icchak, holding an iron in one hand and a small siddur (Jewish prayer book) in the other. Sala was the first to burst out of the room. As if in the grip of madness, she yelled, "I want to live! I want to live!"

I began to run as well. I saw Riwka running at my side. A body was lying by the barbed wire fence. It was Mira Sazpira from Sedlishche, her radiant face upturned toward the sky. I covered her head with my kerchief. I took off my coat to avoid getting caught in the barbed wire. I have no idea how I managed to get across the water-filled ditch. The only thing I remember is Riwka and the girl from Czechoslovakia helping me to cross it. The winding forest path was extremely narrow. How could we possibly run along it? In the twinkling of an eye I was passed by Hinda and Idel, Rozka Pelc, Abraham, Sarka Kac and others. I ran till I could run no more.

Of all those who took part in the Sobibór revolt, only a few reached a safe haven. Shortly after we had run for our lives, masses of SS men, policemen and gendarmes combed the forest, and any runaway that they found was shot on the spot. It was the partisans who told me later about the terrible revenge that the Nazis took on those still in Sobibór. The Lager IV commando was shot on the spot. Moniek Nusfeld and others who had hidden in the bakery were burned alive, as were Kachna, the seamstress from Berlin, and many other women.

Somehow I managed to stay alive. I wandered through the forest with three other women who had been deported from Holland – Ulla Stern, Cathy and Ruth. We were joined by Berek and an elderly man who had worked in the shoemaker's shop. "Let's hide in the undergrowth," I said.

It was October, and when night fell the forest became very dark. As twilight fell we would hide. From time to time we heard shouting and shots. At dawn we would set out. A fairly broad path stretched out before us. "I'm going to see whether we can cross here," said Berek. Shortly afterward we heard the sound of shooting...

For three days and three nights we wandered the forest, plagued by hunger. We were afraid to approach the villages. We found a few grains that we distributed among us, one by one, after counting them. We even tried eating mushrooms, but were attacked by agonizing stomach cramps. And we still stayed near Sobibór. Quite often we came across signs saying "SS Sonderkommando" and "Achtung! Unterminiert!" ("Warning! Mines!"). Our legs and feet became swollen with fatigue. We went past an apple tree growing wild but did not dare pick its fruit. On the ground we found a single small apple that had fallen from the tree. We divided it up between us. "Let's go into a village," I ruled. "We're going to die of hunger in the forest."

Cathy and I entered the village of Zielowek, while the three others waited in the forest. The first peasant we met threatened us with his whip: "Get out of here! I have a wife and children!" Suddenly a Polish policeman appeared: "You're definitely from Sobibór. You can't deny it!" "Shoot us here – but don't take us to Sobibór!" we begged him. He motioned us to go off to the forest, but he gave us a whole loaf of bread! In return, we gave him two

watches.

Some time later a lad brought us a bottle of milk. “The policeman exchanged the watches for vodka and now he’s getting drink in the village,” the lad told us. Both the SS men and the Ukrainian guards used to get drunk in the Zielowek inn. We were alarmed. “If you show us where the partisans are, we’ll give you a beautiful watch as a gift,” we told the boy. He guided us through the forest and we followed him.

We reached the outskirts of one of the villages and there we found another survivor from Sobibór. “Things are quiet here. The Germans don’t come here and the peasants are happy to sell items of food,” he told us. Ruth and the elderly shoemaker, remained in the village. Cathy, Ulla Stern and I set off. We wanted to get as far away from Sobibór as possible.

We wandered around the forest for many days. In our wanderings we met two other survivors from the camp – Lerner and Katyusz. We cooked our meager food together with them and at night slept in piles of hay, shivering and clinging to each other.

One day we saw two men wearing sheepskins. They aimed their rifles at us, but in no time at all they began talking to us in Yiddish. They were partisans, Shewel and Albert. Some of the peasants had told them about the three women wandering around lost in the forest, and they had come looking for us. We now marched along behind them to the partisans’ camp in the forest of Parczew, where we found three more survivors from Sobibór – Tuvia from Belgium, Fedke, a Russian prisoner of war, and Icchak, who would become my husband.

The snow kept falling, interminably. So as to have some warmth and to cook our meals – there were other Jewish families in the forest who had escaped the Germans – we would light a bonfire. Enemy aircraft would fly over the forest, reconnoitering the area: the rising smoke from the bonfire signaled the presence of partisans in the area to them. Then they would rain down bombs on the entire forest, and a few planes would fly low just above the treetops.

The peasants, who would come into the forest ostensibly to gather firewood, tended to indicate our hiding places to the gendarmes. We were

constantly vigilant, alert, ready for anything. What we really wanted to do was to cross the River Bug. A partisan called Leibusz Zilberstajn told us the most wonderful tales about life in the areas that had been liberated.

One day a large-scale raid of the forest was set in motion. Soldiers, gendarmes, and soldiers from the Vlassov Army combed the forest meticulously, sniping the entire time. My feet, which had swollen up, had not yet recovered and so I was unable to run for my life. I found myself lying in the midst of the corpses of those who had been killed. Suddenly I heard little Masza sobbing her heart out. Her voice gave me courage. I got up, took her hand and we began to walk. Suddenly we heard the snapping of dry twigs and we stopped. Peasants, it turned out, had come to strip the corpses of their clothing and footwear. We hid for a while, and then continued walking. We were lucky enough to happen on a sack full of onions and potatoes. We ate a few onions. And they gave us back our strength. When darkness fell, we found a few partisans from the group who had survived, including **Fajga, the mother of Masza and Icchak.**

Another raid – but this time we managed to safely get through the chain of soldiers and policemen combing the forest. We were aiming for the River Bug. We reached it on Christmas 1943. But the snow had suddenly begun to thaw and we had to swim across. “Please, shoot me,” I begged my friends. “I don’t have the strength to move any more, and if I lag behind, I’ll endanger your lives.” But they were not prepared to abandon me and they literally carried me on their shoulders.

Eventually we reached the village of Dubuk, next to which there was a partisans’ camp called Voroshilov. Icchak, a shoemaker by trade, was welcomed there with open arms. The partisans had recently been looking for a good leather worker. We also found some Jews among them, Benc from Domaczow and others. A number of partisan companies passed through this area – “Diadia Fetia,” “Czarny,” “Wanda Wasilewska,” and in each of them we found Jewish fighters as well. The commander of the “Czarny” company gave me a hand grenade and the commander of the “Wanda Wasilewska” gave me a pistol, as a memento of “the first Polish-speaking female partisan that I found in the forest”.

The Bug area was still too close to Sobibór. Only in Israel did I find peace

for myself.