

TRANSLATION OF CHELM YIZKOR BOOK (FROM YIDDISH) PAGES 85-88

The author received testimony from Noach Szuchmacher (1899-1957)

[page 85] **THE BLOODY MARCH TO THE BUG RIVER**

It started as soon as the Nazis arrived. There was not an hour without Jewish (Yiddish) blood. But the first organized deportation ("*tearing out*") occurred on the 1st of December 1939, seven weeks after the occupation. Noach Szuchmacher witnessed and was part of the bloody march to the Bug river and was one of the few survivors. He was also the first Chelmer to arrive in Argentina who could give an eye-witness account.

According to what he relates, it happened in the following way. The Nazi commander named Fisher, ordered the Jewish community head, Anshal Biderman that all Jewish males aged between 16-60 years old had to assemble on the 1st of December. This meant all healthy males. Approximately two thousand Jewish males came. The head of the community had run around all night to Jewish houses, giving the order to assemble, without mentioning that order applied to healthy males. He was worried that if he said only healthy males, people would pretend to be sick and so would avoid the assembly. He would risk having insufficient numbers to meet the Nazi order. So according to the order, both healthy and sick males came.

As soon as they arrived, they were encircled by the Gestapo and began to be forced along the Hrubieszow road on the way to the Bug river, understanding from the Nazis that they would be led across (the Bug river) to the Soviet side.

The first sacrifice of this bloody march was Itche Shefeles. I knew him from *cheder* years. He was a teacher and I learnt *Chumash* and *Rashi* from him. He lived at that time in the "new quarter". His father was a soldier. His brother's son, I knew as a young communist and I think he had a high rank in the Polish government.

Itche realized he had made a mistake. He was 63 years old and the order was for men aged 16-60. He walked up with his identification document in hand to the Gestapo head to show his error. The answer was a revolver shot.

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The second one killed was the son of a well known family, Menashe, the tombstone engraver. The family's name Mandelbaum, was known for its sons who were among the Chelmer intelligentsia. One son remained in Chelm with his father. (Others lived in Paris from the last war.) The son in Chelm was a cripple and that is why they shot him in the market place before the march began. There they also shot the baker, Yankel Brilliant.

It was already obvious what was awaiting the Jews on this march. And the mass killing began within a kilometer from the market place.

There were now about two thousand Jews on their last "march" through the Hrubieszow forest where once they enjoyed reading and discussing things. As soon as they entered the forest, the shooting began of twenty men. Amongst these were Doctor Ax; the old well known dentist Doctor Sekular; Bagia Sulon; Shimon Zadfodam and Gatzl Mayer; Aaron Grynman; Yitzhak Goldman and his son Avraham. Also there was a woman, Doctor Feldman. It was stated that

only men were in the group marching. Perhaps she accompanied someone. The other names of those shot was not known to the narrator.

Hrubieszow is located seven miles from Chelm and between these two towns there was a path/track ("shocej") on which passed a never ending caravan of carters. Heavy loaded wagons drawn by 3-4 horses in width, travelled day and night along the track to the never ending sound of horses neighing. This was the goods transport path between Chelm and Hrubieszow. And it was this track, for the first time, where the first Jewish slaughter began on the 1st of December, 1939. Over half of the Jews were left lying shot dead on this seven mile track between Chelm and Hrubieszow.

The peasants from surrounding villages who came to Chelm the following were shocked to tell what they had seen: hundreds of dead, shot Jews lying about on the way to Chelm.

The remaining families of those men who had left (on the 1st of December), in their sorrow ran to the Nazi commander to beg for mercy.

The Chelm town representative at that time was a native born in Germany who was asked by the families (as related by Noach Szuchmacher) to go to the German command to inform him of the injustice of the driven out Jews.

The commandant listened, then calmed his fellow "German" with these words :

"Today we have the Jews for breakfast; tomorrow, if need be we will have the Poles for lunch" and "you, go home and don't mix in our things".

This description by the "folks deutsche" (native born German) sounds a bit naive to me, but I'm relating it as it was told to me.

In Hrubieszow, the Germans gathered another eight hundred Jews, added to the remaining Chelmer survivors and forced them to the Bug river. On reaching the Bug river only four hundred Jews remained. Before they crossed the river, the Nazi commandant gave a speech to the half dead survivors, and assured them that no more Jews would be killed. He told them however, after crossing to the Soviet side, no one is allowed to return. Anyone who returns will be shot immediately.

And he kept his word; no survivor was shot. They chose a shallow part of the river, where several hundred Jews were told to cross the river. These Jews, with loaded guns behind them, in a mid-winter night, with water up to their necks, carrying the weaker ones who couldn't go further. Reaching the Soviet side , eight Jews died of exhaustion and cold. After a short time, the Soviets put them on small boats and sent them back to German rule.

Of these returned Jews, not all returned home. Those who returned by different means to Chelm, numbered in total one hundred and fifty. The others perished along the way from exhaustion.

The only name which the narrator remembers of those who died on the way home was Chaim Itche Shparer, a butcher who died of leg wounds.

Szuchmacher returned to Chelm. The fear of being recognized by the Nazis as a returned survivor and the consequences of that, led him to a daring step of leaving his wife (Yenta) and children (Pearl and Rachel) and most of the family, whom he believed were not in such danger; He returned to the Soviet side.

He later served in the military under General Anders.

After the war, as mentioned, he was the first Chelmer to arrive in Argentina. His whole family in Chelm perished. Nachman Nisenbaum from whom I received most of the information about the destruction of Chelm, saw photographs while working (? for the Gestapo) of the terrible massacre in the forest.