

Geheime Staatspolizei — Stapostelle Brünn

Nachrichten-Übermittlung

Aufgenommen				Raum für Eingangsstempel				Befördert					
Tag	Monat	Jahr	Zeit	Zentralstelle Mähr. Ostrau. Eingang: 15. 10. 39 S. Idien: Abtlg.: Bl. Nr.:				Tag	Monat	Jahr	Zeit		
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S e f t r a n d

Adolf Eichman's wire to the Gestapo in Ostrava announcing that the transport will be heading to Nisko upon San
 Photo: National Archives (NA)

The first transports of European Jews in the history of the holocaust

The 18th of October 2014 marked the 75th anniversary of the departure of the very first transport of European Jews in the history of the holocaust – one that left Ostrava for Nisko upon San in the eastern part of the General Government where the Nazis planned to set up an extensive “reservation” for Jews displaced from the conquered territories and the whole of Germany. As part of the Nisko Plan¹, a total of seven transports with more than five thousand Jews departed from Ostrava, Katowice and Vienna in the latter half of October 1939. Their journey materialised even though, by the time of departure of the first transport, the top Nazi officials had dismissed the entire plan of establishing a Jewish reservation between the Rivers Vistula and Bug. The ensuing destinies of thousands of Jewish deportees varied; however, most of them were to die or suffer in Nazi as well as in Soviet prisons and camps.

JAN DVOŘÁK, JAN HORNÍK, ADAM HRADILEK

THE PLAN

Nazi Germany’s attack on Poland on 1 September 1939 triggered World War II. The Nazi troops progressed at a blitz pace – by early October 1939 the Nazis had occupied the entire western part of Poland following a brief period of resistance of Polish military forces. In turn, the eastern part of the Polish territory had gradually been taken by the Red Army since mid-September 1939.²

The occupation of western Poland effectively represented the first step towards the implementation of the Nazis’ territorial plans for germanising and colonising the eastern territories. In their plans for the future, only Germans were to live on the Polish territory annexed directly to the Third Reich³; accordingly it was to be “purged” from non-German elements as soon as possible. The invaders had adapted their mode of operation to this goal since the first days of the

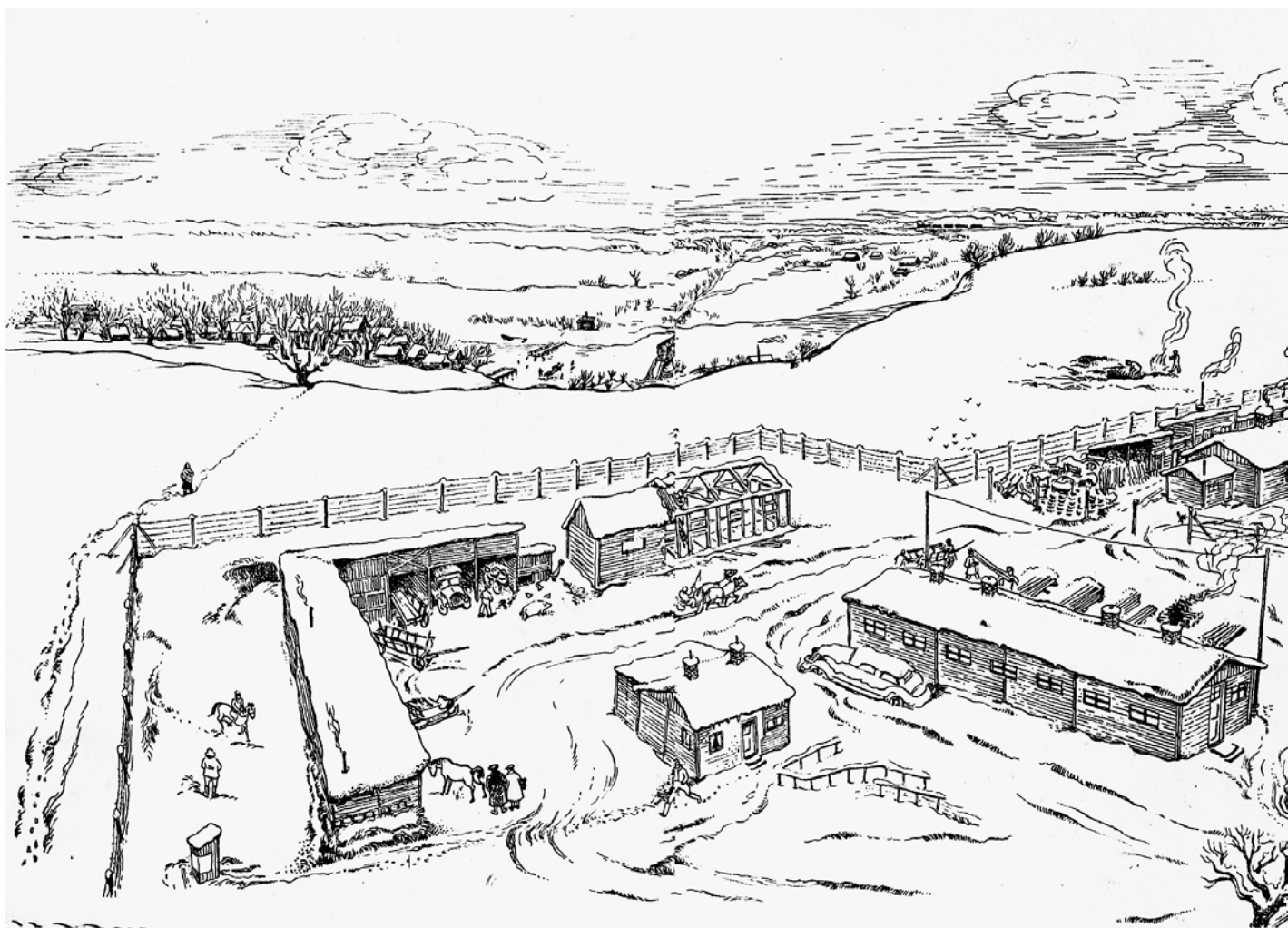
occupation. Inhabitants rejecting germanisation or those whom the Nazis deemed unfit due to racial, political or other reasons were to be displaced or exterminated. Although all the ethnic groups living on the Polish territory were in for difficult times, the worst destiny was being prepared for Jews.

The Nazis pursued the full expulsion of Polish Jews from the very beginning, but their task was daunting – the annexed Polish territories were still home to almost two million Jews in 1939 – four times as many as in the Reich itself.⁴ The Nazis got to work with zeal, though, and soon the first plans for resolving the local Jewish question emerged.

One of such plans was to concentrate Jews in a certain area that would serve as an extensive “reservation” or “ghetto”. Accordingly, the top Nazi officials decided to set up the Jewish Reservation (Judenreservat) in the eastern part of occupied Poland, which was to gradually gather

the “entire Jewry” in early October 1939. The primary “candidate” for such a territory was the swampy area around the city of Lublin (in the eastern part of the General Government); “advantageously”, the area already had a considerable density of Jewish population and was not intended for germanisation in the future.

The preparations for displacing Jews from the conquered Polish territories started in earnest following the order of the head of the Gestapo Heinrich Müller of 6 October 1939, under which some 70,000–80,000 Jews from the Katowice area were supposed to be relocated east of the Vistula. It included the possibility of relocating Jews from around Moravská Ostrava. The preparations for the very first transport probably started in Berlin on that very day – an instruction was issued to compile the lists of all Jews on record in Germany, the Protectorate and former Austria and to divide them by religious com-



munities: the Gestapo was to provide lists of arrested Jews of Polish nationality. The Jews intended for relocation were to be deprived of all property.⁵ On the following day, 7 October 1939, the decision that Vienna would be included in the initial transports was adopted at a meeting between the Head of the Reich Main Security Office Reinhard Heydrich and Hitler, probably at the Führer's own request. Looking back at Hitler's own history, it becomes obvious why he was eminently eager to "purge" Austria's capital of Jews as soon as possible.⁶ At any rate, the preparations for transports intensified considerably from that moment on.

The Gestapo was in charge of the organisation in cooperation with the Central Offices for Jewish Emigration in Vienna and Prague. Heinrich Müller, the head of the Gestapo, entrusted

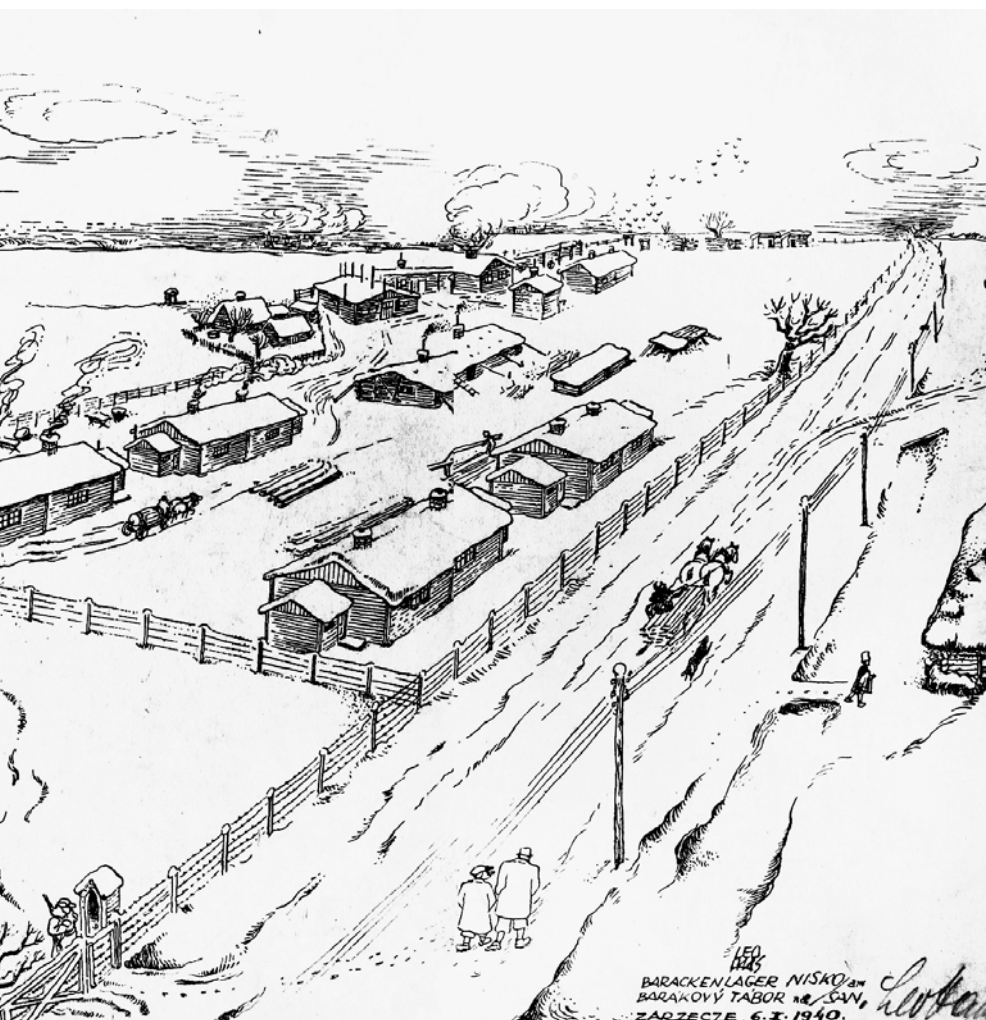
the coordination of the project to Adolf Eichmann, the head of the Jewish Department of the Reich Main Security Office and the founder of both Central Offices. It was also Eichmann who, in a matter of days, personally selected the location for the first camp – a hillcock near the community of Zarzecze near Nisko upon San. The project was presented to the general public as a voluntary initiative of the respective Jewish religious communities.⁷

THE TRANSPORTS

Based on Müller's initial order, the territory of the Katowice government district was to be purged first, with the Ostrava area added to the deportation as part of the "purge" of Upper Silesia. There were other reasons for the inclusion of Jews from the Protectorate Ostrava area in the ini-

tial transports as well. The massive evacuation of Jews from the Katowice area required extensive financial and material resources, and the relatively affluent Jewish Community in Ostrava could provide financial backing to the project easier than communities in Upper Silesia – i.e., provide the construction material as well as qualified experts and craftspeople to build the camp. This is likely why Ostrava's Jews were the first to be deported.

The Jewish Community in Ostrava, which organised the bulk of transport preparations (including the financial backing and technical issues), issued a request for all Jews aged over 14 to register immediately and complete the forms provided by Prague's Central Office for Jewish Emigration based on the Gestapo order as early as on 11 October 1939.



A drawing of the Zarzecze camp by a former prisoner Leo Haas
 Photo: NA and Archive of the City of Ostrava

gible. Following the medical “check”, the selected men were taken to the train station in Přívoz and herded into a train waiting there. They had to spend the entire following night in locked cars. Eventually, 901 Jews set out towards Bohumín on a train of 51 cars (including 29 cargo units containing construction material) on Wednesday 18 October at about 8.30 a.m. The train continued along the route Dziedzice, Auschwitz, Krakow, Tarnow, Rzeszow and Przeworsk until it reached its destination in Nisko upon San.

The second group of transports to Nisko were Jews from Upper Silesia for whom the entire project had been developed originally. The transport of the Upper Silesian Jews was prepared along with that from Moravská Ostrava. The departure of the first transport from Katowice was scheduled for 20 October 1939 and was initially intended to relocate 1,029 Jews aged 16 to 60 primarily from the vicinities of Katowice, Krolewska Huta, Chorzow and Bielsko. Prior to departure, the selected men were gathered in a gym near the Katowice station. Later reports indicate, however, that “approximately 875 male Jews” left with the first Katowice transport – substantially fewer than planned.¹⁰

On the same day, 20 October 1939, the very first Vienna transport with at least 912 Jews left the city’s Aspangbahnhof late in the evening. Since the Vienna transport also failed to provide enough “volunteers”, it included former prisoners from concentration camps (e.g. Dachau), who had no chance to emigrate, and Jews expelled from Burgenland.¹¹

The subsequent transports were prepared only after the top Nazi officials had ordered a halt to the Nisko Plan. Eichmann nevertheless managed to obtain the approval for the prepared displacement of at least several hundred other Jews. The second transport eventually left Os-

Based on the registration results, which had to be reported by 14 October, there were 4,510 Jews (of which 2,232 were men) within the Ostrava community. The Gestapo in Ostrava then wrote the text of a notice whereby the Jewish Community requested all male Jews to appear at the Ostrava riding school on the morning of Tuesday 17 October to depart for training. The notice was printed in selected Ostrava dailies, usually on the front page, between 12 and 16 October. Those who would not show up faced severe punishment. As early as on 12 October, the Ostrava Jewish Community issued an instruction regarding the unified equipment of transport participants – the proposal for a “one-man outfit” totalled 55 items (including a suitcase or backpack, winter clothes, underwear, toiletries, dishes and a kerosene lamp).⁸

Some Jews chose to go into hiding or run away to avoid deportation as soon as the departure notice had been published. Obviously, that made transport organisation difficult for the authorities in charge. The hastily organised plan had to include improvisation. As a result, the Jewish Community in Frýdek received the draft order for all men aged over 14 just 20 hours before the departure – at noon on 16 October. There was no time left to procure the outfits, so many of the Frýdek Jews came to Ostrava with no luggage at all on the morning of 17 October.⁹

The final selection of the men for the transport in the Ostrava riding school near Don Bosco (St Joseph) Church involved a medical examination. Supervised by the Gestapo, Nazi doctors even declared men who were obviously elderly or sick as eli-

trava on 26 October 1939 in the evening and comprised about 400 Jews, mainly prisoners “supplied” by the Brno Gestapo and escapees from the first transport. It was coupled with the second Katowice transport comprising 1,000 people in Katowice and the combined train left for Nisko on 27 October, again in the evening.¹² Although the lists of the participants in the transports from Katowice have not survived, unlike the Ostrava and Vienna deportation lists, it is estimated that the Katowice transports included at least 200 Jews from the Těšín (Cieszyn) area, i.e. from the part of it that had belonged to Czechoslovakia until the end of September 1938 (called Zaolzie by Poles, or Zaolží in Czech).¹³ Indeed, both of the Ostrava transports included Jews coming from the Těšín area – many of those who had fled from the territory seized by Poland for the rest of the republic prior to the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia departed from Ostrava. The second Vienna transport with 669 people (Moser says there were 672 of them)¹⁴ left on 26 October and reached Nisko upon San three days later on 29 October.¹⁵

Although the third wave of transports was prepared in Katowice and Vienna as well, a train with 322 Jews “supplied” primarily from Prague only left Ostrava on 1 November. It did not reach its destination, however, because high water in the River San had broken the bridge near Zarzecze. The train was diverted to Sosnowiec in Upper Silesia where the deportees were accommodated in a temporary Jewish concentration camp and taken care of by the local Jewish community. The plan was to transport these men to Nisko but that never materialised as the entire project was discontinued. The Sosnowiec camp was dismissed in the spring of 1940. Some 60–80 prisoners were permitted to leave to join their relatives in the General Government and some 250 were transported to the Vyhne camp in Slovakia. Some of them managed to flee and save their lives by leaving early for a safe country – most often Palestine. The majority of them were sent to extermination camps in 1942, however.¹⁶

THE END OF THE NISKO PLAN

The paradox of the Nisko Plan is that the top Nazi officials had already decided to suspend the deportations to Nisko as the first transport was leaving the station. Hitler decided (based on a consultation with Heinrich Himmler) that preference in eliminating Jews would be given to the Reichsgaus of Wartheland and West Prussia at a meeting in Berlin on 17 October 1939. The departures of the subsequent transports which were under preparation were allowed mainly to maintain the prestige of the state police.¹⁷

On arrival in Nisko, a thorough selection was performed only with the first Ostrava transport, as it was necessary to gather experts to build and operate the Zarzecze camp. It soon became apparent that its optimum capacity as built would be about 500 prisoners. Even though all subsequently arriving people, except for a half of the first Ostrava transport and several dozen people from the subsequent transports, were expelled immediately, mostly towards the nearby German-Soviet border (there were more than four and a half thousand of those), almost one thousand prisoners remained in the camp at the end of October 1939. Their number was then radically reduced to about 500 on 20 November and after that it would just decrease slightly over time. According to the camp leaders these exiles were also to be sent to the Soviet territory. Although returning was forbidden under a threat of being shot, several groups dared turn back towards home.¹⁸

Even those who were allowed to stay in the camp would flee over the course of the subsequent days, weeks and months. The camp guards, comprising approximately twenty SS men and security services, were not always adequately scrupulous about their duties. Prisoner escapes were recorded at all branches of the camp located in several villages north of Nisko. Those escapees also headed mostly towards the German-Soviet border. Crossing the demarcation line was only possible until Christmas 1939; after that the border was closed hermetically.

Anyone who tried to cross it was sent back by the Soviet border guards and had to return to the towns and villages around the camp. As a result, many were reduced to barely surviving the ensuing months in poverty in the larger towns in Nazi-occupied Galicia where there still were numerous Jewish communities – e.g., in Ulanow, Przemysl, Tomaszow, Zamoscie, Belzec and Lublin.¹⁹

The camp in Zarzecze was eventually closed in April 1940 and some of its prisoners were allowed to return home. Based on the surviving statistics, an organised collective transport from Nisko brought back some 300 people to Ostrava, about 200 to Vienna and about 20 to the Těšín area. Dozens of others returned on their own, some quite possibly with the approval of authorities, prior to as well as after the date of departure of the return transport.²⁰ The return home was not a happy ending for most of them, however. Over the course of the war, they were deported again to other Nazi concentration or extermination camps and few of them came back.

IN SOVIET CAMPS

Since only about every ninth prisoner was allowed to stay at the provisional concentration camp on the San, all others – more than four and a half thousand deportees – were expelled east, to the German-Soviet demarcation line, immediately on arrival in Nisko. The official border was only being demarcated at the time so there was still a “no-man’s land” between the rivers San and Bug. The journey itself towards the border was literally an ordeal for many – in particular older and sick people suffered during the difficult walks in late autumn and difficult swampy terrain, and some did not survive the hardships. Gangs of Polish and Ukrainian brigands, robbing the refugees, represented another threat.²¹

Most exiles eventually obeyed the Nazi guards’ instructions to leave for the Soviet territory and tried to illegally cross the German-Soviet border. Some of them perished during attempts to cross the border rivers

or were shot by Soviet or Nazi border guards that would fire without warning, especially at night. Others made it to the Soviet territory under more or less dramatic circumstances. Then they would continue to cities and towns on the territory of Galicia occupied by the Soviet Union (Stryi, Sambir, Drohobych, Stanislav, Buchach and mostly Lvov) where they could live in relative peace for several months. Even though the new German-Soviet border was guarded relatively well, especially on the Soviet side, some individuals and groups of Jews expelled from Nisko managed to return to the Soviet territory. In turn, others managed to get as far as Romania from the Soviet territory.²²

Soviet authorities started registering all foreigners in May 1940 with a view to clearing the borderland. Police patrols took those without correct documents away for interrogation. Like other refugees, Jews from Nisko were given three options to choose from: accept Soviet citizenship, return home or go abroad. Just a fraction opted for Soviet nationality; most decided to return home. Going abroad was an option open only for those who held the affidavit, a special document. Those who opted for Soviet nationality were usually given jobs in Soviet Galicia.²³ All others who chose the remaining two alternatives were detained sooner or later and held as “socially dangerous individuals” facing between three and eight years in a labour camp in Siberia or in other places of forced exile. A substantial number of them were arrested again

in the late spring or summer of 1940 and sentenced by a special NKVD jury mostly for three (illegal border crossing) to five years (espionage and other anti-Soviet activities) of hard labour in forced labour camps. Given the huge number of refugees arrested at the time, many people were deported to the camps even without a court verdict.²⁴ Despite the fact that they often had to literally fight for their lives there, paradoxically – due to war developments – in the end they stood a better chance of survival than those who avoided the deportations to the GULAG and remained in Galicia at the time of arrival of Nazi forces. It is estimated that, once the deportations to Soviet camps had peaked in June 1940, less than 300 Czechoslovak Jews – Nisko refugees – remained in Galicia and Volhynia. Some evacuated; many died as the frontline progressed; others were murdered during the pogroms organised by the Ukrainian auxiliary forces that came to Lvov following the Wehrmacht in the summer of 1941. Others died in the gas chambers of the extermination camp in Belzec.²⁵

Just a handful of the “luckiest ones” managed to leave the GULAG during the war and join military units being formed in the Soviet Union. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR, Poles were the first to organise their international army. Some prisoners (primarily those coming from the Těšín area) used this opportunity and, with a view to being released, enlisted as volunteers for the Polish forces. The top Soviet officials then announced an amnesty for Czechoslovak citi-

zens – except for those sentenced for espionage – in early 1942. Czechoslovak Jews released from Soviet labour camps were among the very first volunteers of the Czechoslovak military unit that formed in Buzuluk in early 1942. For many of their peers, however, the amnesty came too late. Some never even learned of it and had to serve their sentences until the end. Many never returned to their homeland.

The voluntary enlistment in the Czechoslovak military unit in the USSR eventually saved some 350 Jews from the Ostrava and Frýdek area who had been deported to Nisko upon San.²⁶ During the ensuing war years, they went through all the bloody battles on the Eastern Front, from Sokolovo to Dukla to Ostrava. Just 123 of them lived to return home; 90 out of those came back to Ostrava. We also know about several Jews from the Těšín area included in the Katowice transports who survived imprisonment in the GULAG camps and fought on the Eastern Front as members of the Czechoslovak military unit during subsequent war years.²⁷

The Vienna Jews were in a much more difficult position than Czechs or Poles, as they did not have their international military units in the Soviet Union. Most of them only spoke German and, in addition, Austria had become an integral part of the Reich after the Anschluss of March 1938. As a result, most of them had to stay in the camps. Therefore, just 73 people out of more than 1,500 deportees ultimately survived the war.²⁸

Deportees' cameos based on NKVD documents

Between 2012 and 2014 members of the ÚSTR Oral History Group managed to obtain copies of hundreds of the NKVD's investigation files on Czechoslovak citizens persecuted in the USSR from Ukrainian state archives and the Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). They include investigation files of Jews deported to Nisko upon San who came to the territory of the USSR and were arrested, accused of espionage or illegal border crossing and sentenced to many years of imprisonment in the GULAG camps. The following are cameos of people deported to Nisko from Ostrava, Katowice and Vienna, compiled on the basis of the above documents. Since the research is ongoing, this is just a sample selection.

Karel and Erich Egger

Karel Egger was born in Velké Karlovice near the current Czech-Slovak border on 28 November 1909. His father Viktor was an engine driver. Karel lived in Frýdek and worked as a driver in Ostrava. He and his brother Erich (born on 27 May 1915) and other Jews from Ostrava were supposed to join a transport to Nisko upon San at the end of October 1939 but they chose to flee. First they walked over to Slovakia through the forest, then crossed the border to occupied Poland. On 29 October they forded across the River San near Lesko on the new German-Soviet border. They were arrested by NKVD personnel in Lesko and transported to NKVD's Prison No. 1 in Lvov where their interrogations started. Several months later, Karel Egger was taken to a NKVD prison in Poltava and his brother Erich to a prison in Nikolayevsk. The interrogations continued – they were suspected of being Nazi spies. Following ten months of detention, they were sentenced – by coincidence on the same day, 10 August 1940 – for illegal border crossing: Karel to three years and Erich to five years of slavery in the GULAG camps. The brothers reunited in the Samarlag camp on the River Volga near the Kazakhstan border where they worked on the construction site for a factory. Upon its completion in April 1941, Karel Egger was transported to one of the Ukhtpechlag camps in the subpolar region of northern Russia.²⁹ Not much is known about the subsequent whereabouts of his brother Erich. The NKVD file only contains a mention to the effect that he died “in the place of serving sentence” on 30 March 1943.³⁰ There is no knowledge of which of the GULAG camps it was.

Karel Egger was released from the camp on 26 January 1942 on the basis of amnesty and sent to the Czechoslovak military unit in Buzuluk where he undertook military training. He took part in the unit's first combat action near Sokolovo as a corporal on 8 March 1943 and was captured by the Nazis. Nazis murdered the majority of Czechoslovak POWs of Jewish origin immediately or later in concentration camps. However, they used Karel Egger and four other captured Czechoslovaks for propaganda. They were transported to Prague in September 1943 and forced to relate the “naked truth” about the conditions in the Soviet camps and about the non-Czech nature of the Czechoslovak troop (comprising many Czechoslovak Ukrainians and Jews released from the GULAG) at a press conference for Protectorate journalists. Karel Egger described how the Soviets treated him as a Jew who was seeking a better



environment for living in the Soviet Union than in the Protectorate. The prisoners' accounts gave rise to a number of articles that filled the pages of the Protectorate press at that time. Their destinies were covered in detail in a propaganda brochure from 1943, *Prisoners of War Speak Out*.³¹ Unlike other Czech POWs who were forced to enlist in the Wehrmacht, Karel Egger was murdered by the Nazis in an unknown place once the propaganda project was over.

The Goldflam Brothers

Viktor (born on 17 November 1896), Otto (19 May 1899), Rudolf (23 June 1906) and Bedřich (17 February 1904) Goldflam were arrested by the Gestapo in Brno in September 1939 and interned in the prison at Špilberk Castle. They were transported to Nisko upon San on 18 October 1939. Immediately on arrival in Nisko, the SS guards led them among a group of about one hundred men from the



Fingerprints were taken from all refugees to the USSR after their arrest
Photo: State Archive of Lviv Oblast (DALO)

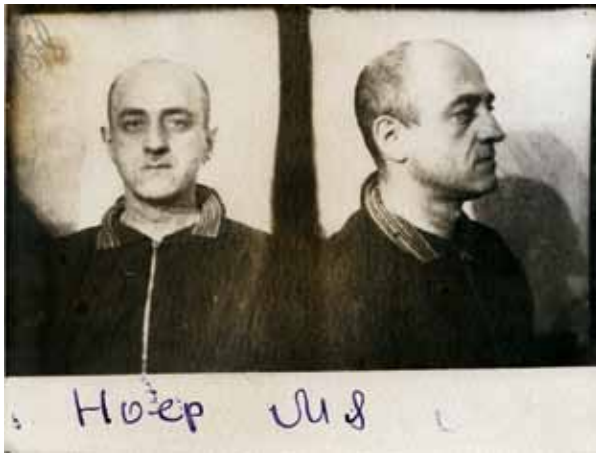
transport towards the Soviet border across the River San. There, they ordered them to go towards the Soviet Union and warned that anyone who tried to return would be shot. The Goldflam brothers crossed the border to the territory occupied by the Soviet Union on 31 October 1939 near the community of Sinyava. From there they continued on to Lvov where they arrived on 9 November 1939. Viktor and Rudolf stayed in Lvov whereas Otto and Bedřich left for a nearby village to look for a job. Viktor was arrested by the NKVD on 27 May 1940 and sentenced on 10 February 1941 for “illegally crossing the border to the territory of the USSR where he dwelt without documents authorising him to stay for several months”.³² He served his sentence in the Volgograd camp of the GULAG situated three hundred kilometres north of Moscow. There he met his brother Rudolf who was sentenced in a separate trial.³³ Otto Goldflam was deported by the NKVD from the Lvov Oblast to Kiev in May 1940 and was on forced deployment on a construction site. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR, he was evacuated to Andijan, Uzbekistan on 7 July 1941 and worked in a garage until April 1942. All four brothers were lucky enough to live to see the amnesty for Czechoslovak citizens imprisoned in the USSR and they were released to join the forming Czechoslovak



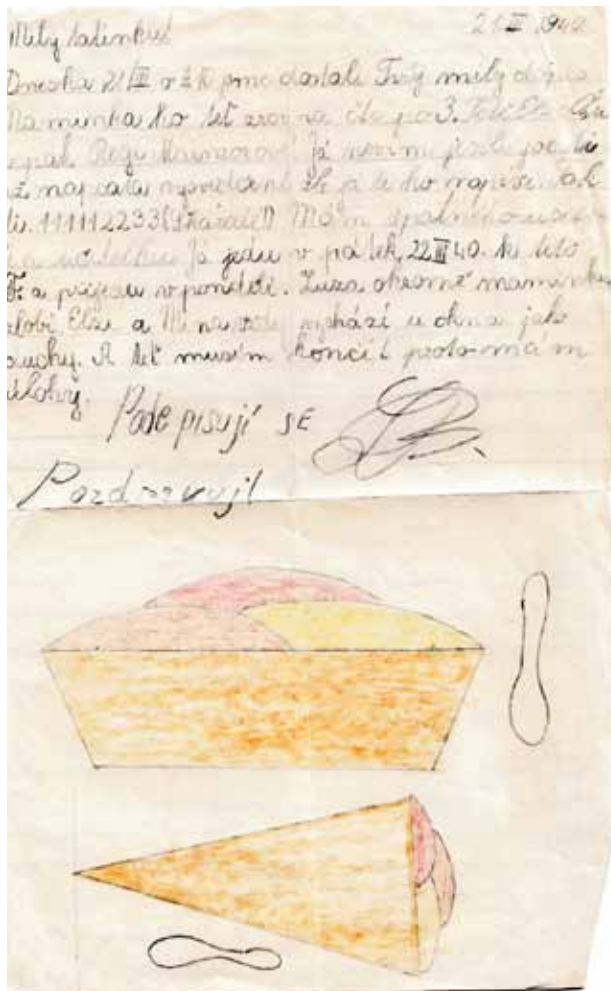
military unit in Buzuluk in 1942 – Rudolf and Viktor in February and Otto and Bedřich in late May. Side by side with other Czechoslovaks, they fought to free their country. Otto Goldflam, the father of the popular theatre artist and writer Arnošt Goldflam, was injured twice but he and his brothers lived to see the end of the war.

Marek Neuer

Marek Neuer was born in Rymanova Vola in Galicia on 24 September 1904. In 1914 his family sought refuge from pogroms and the war in Michalovce in Slovakia. He later lived in Brno and worked as a physician. The Gestapo arrested him as a Polish national in mid-September 1939 and imprisoned him in the prison in Brno’s Špilberk Castle. He and several other Jewish prisoners were taken to Ostrava in October and included in the second Ostrava transport headed for Nisko upon San. As a physician, he was not expelled towards the German-Soviet border on arrival but was allowed to stay near the camp. Nevertheless, on 8 December 1939 he crossed the border to the USSR along with a large group of prisoners and then stayed in Lvov for several months. That is where he was arrested on 14 March 1940. He was sentenced to three years in forced la-



bour camps for illegal border crossing in Chernigov on 13 July 1940. He reached the camp near the town of Kandalaksha in the Murmansk Oblast on the Kola Peninsula by train and boat. Thanks to his profession he was appointed as the prisoners' physician in the camp. There were 2,000 prisoners in the camp at the time and five of them were physicians. The camp was evacuated after the Nazi attack



on the USSR in July 1941. Neuer was sent to North Ural to a camp near Solikamsk with a more benevolent regime where he worked as a physician again. He was released at the turn of 1941/1942 on the basis of the amnesty for Polish nationals. He briefly worked in a hospital in Bukhara, Uzbekistan and then left for Gudzar, Tajikistan and found a job again as a physician in a home for the elderly. His primary goal was to make it to Palestine. He abandoned the plan after the deterioration of Polish-Soviet relations after the unveiling of the Katyn Massacre in 1943; he went to Buzuluk and enlisted as a volunteer with the emerging Czechoslovak Army.³⁴ He made it all the way to Czechoslovakia with the Czechoslovak battalion and became the commander of the Military Hospital in Slaný and later headed the Internal Medicine Ward of the Ústí nad Labem Hospital. He enrolled for the Jewish military organisation Hagana in the autumn of 1948. He left for Israel in early 1949 and worked as a physician there again. Marek Neuer died in 1972.³⁵

Max Bachrach

Max Bachrach was born in Hranice na Moravě on 14 December 1887. He lived in Moravská Ostrava with his wife and two daughters. He worked as a mining inspector in the local coal mines. He was deported to Nisko upon San on 18 October 1939 as part of the first Ostrava transport. He crossed the border to the USSR near Dakhnov on 25 October 1939. The officials at the border guard headquarters issued him with a temporary permit to stay on the Soviet territory. He lived in Lvov until 16 November 1939, then left for Buchach where he stayed until his arrest on 17 June 1940. He was charged with illegal border crossing and sent to the Unzhlag penitentiary labour camp in the Volga Region without a trial. He was released on 21 January 1942 but his subsequent whereabouts are unknown.³⁶ His wife Helena and younger daughter Lilly perished in Auschwitz in 1944.³⁷



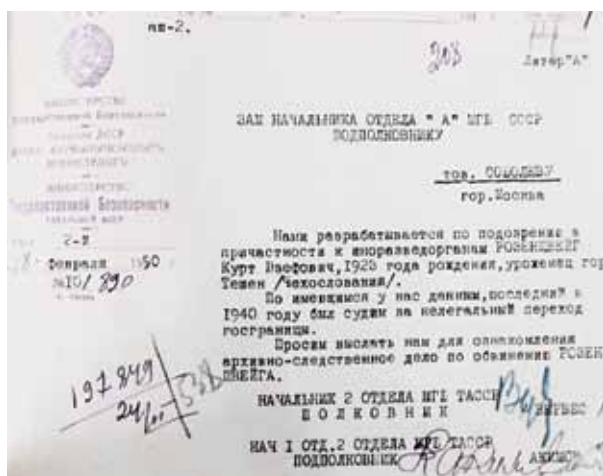
A letter sent to Max Bachrach by his daughter from the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia
Photo: SBU Archive in Kiev



Kurt Rosenzweig

Kurt Rosenzweig was born in Těšín in 1923. His father, who died in 1940, had worked at a bank and his mother taught foreign languages. Kurt Rosenzweig was included in the second of the Katowice transports headed for Nisko upon San on 27 October 1939. On arrival, the Nazi guards along with other prisoners took him to the nearby community of Jaroczyn from where they were forced to cross the border to the Soviet Union. They did so near the village of Rudka where they were detained by the Soviet border guards and then sent to Sinyava for registration. There, they were searched, interrogated and finally ordered to leave the border zone within twenty-four hours. They walked to the nearest railway station, Rava-Ruska, and went on to Lvov. Rosenzweig registered as a refugee in Lvov and attempted to return to Těšín. In the meantime, he lived in a refugee shelter based in a former dancing school. A raid on refugees took place there on 27 June 1940 and Rosenzweig was arrested by the NKVD. Following three weeks in various prisons he was sent to the White Sea-Baltic labour camp. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR in June 1941, he relocated to the Kargopolag camp in the Arkhangelsk Oblast in the north of Russia. Only in 1942 he was notified that he had been sentenced to three years in penitentiary labour camps for illegal border crossing (the ruling of the Special Council of the NKVD was only issued on 18 November 1942). He had been recognised as partially disabled several months earlier.

He was not released until June 1944, after almost four years spent in the GULAG camps. From then on he lived in Bugulma in Tatarstan. He did not attempt to return to his homeland, as all of his relatives had perished in Auschwitz. He was granted Soviet citizenship at his own request in 1947. Rosenzweig lived to see his rehabilitation; he applied for it in November 1988 and a court in Lvov honoured his application on 25 January 1989.³⁸



Hugo Mandler

Hugo Mandler was born in Vienna on 2 May 1902. He worked at a photography lab and then as a car mechanic. He was interned in the Dachau concentration camp



In 1950, the Ministry of State Security of the Tatar ASSR sent a request to Moscow for Kurt Rosenzweig's documents because they suspected him of cooperating with a foreign intelligence agency

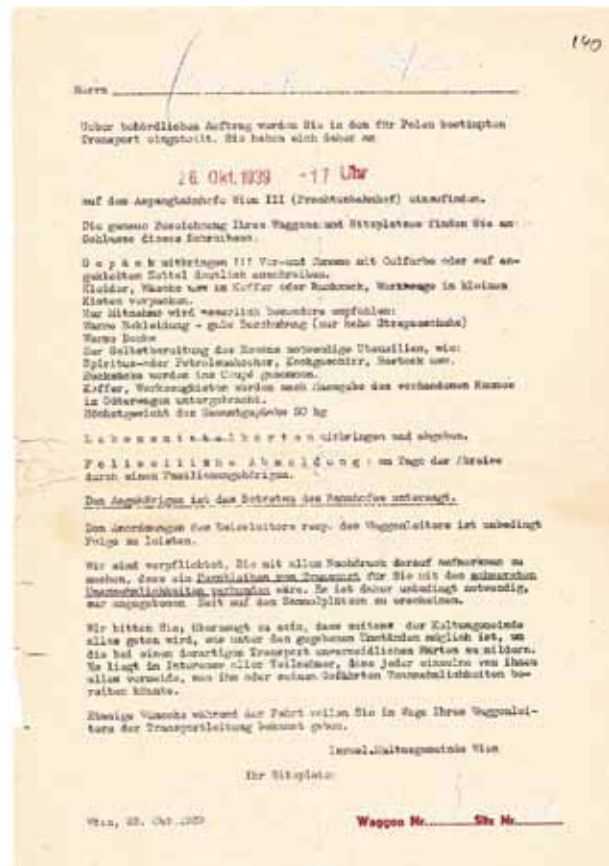
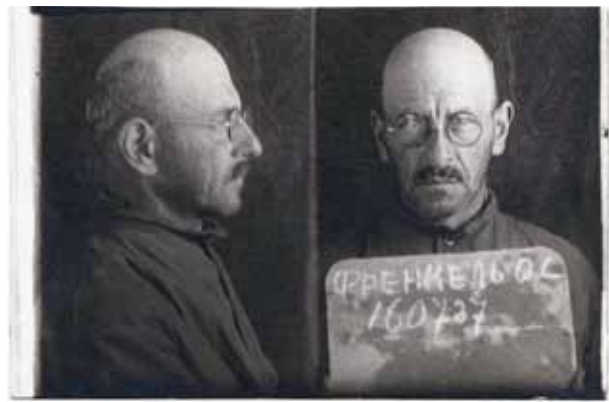
Kurt Rosenzweig was sentenced to three years in prison for illegally crossing the border to the USSR

Photo: DALO

based on his Jewish origin from 15 November 1938 to 15 July 1939.³⁹ When released, he received a testimonial for obtaining a visa from the Dominican Republic consulate in Switzerland in the late summer but did not manage to collect it in Bern. He was included in the second Vienna transport in October 1939 and arrived in Nisko upon San on 26 October 1939. As a craftsman, he was not forced to cross over to the USSR immediately; he stayed in the camp with several other selected prisoners to participate in building the camp. When it was completed, he and others were expelled towards the German-Soviet border, which he crossed on 17 December 1939. He first went to Sinyava, then took a train to Lvov where he lived, without a permit to stay, for several months and searched for temporary jobs. The NKVD arrested him on 28 June 1940. During interrogations, the Soviet authorities wanted to know, inter alia, the tasks he was given by the Gestapo during his interment in Dachau and on leaving Nisko (*sic*). Then he was accused of staying illegally in the USSR under Sections 80 and 33 of the Penal Code and deported to Volgograd near Rybinsk in the Yaroslavl Oblast. Not until 18 April 1942 was he sentenced by the Special Council of the NKVD as a socially dangerous element to 5 years in labour camps. The ruling could not be enforced, however, as Hugo Mandler had been released on the basis of the ordinance on amnesty for Polish citizens of 25 December 1941. There is no knowing how he managed to convince his jailors that he was a Polish national. His subsequent whereabouts are unknown.⁴⁰

Otto Fränkel

Otto Fränkel was born in Bratislava on 29 August 1894. He served in the Austro-Hungarian army as a lieutenant of artillery during WWI. After the inception of the Czechoslovak Republic, he applied for Austrian nationality in December 1920 and moved to Vienna where he subsequently graduated in law. He was an active member of the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet) in the 1930s. His origins led to his first brush with the Dachau concentration camp – he was briefly interned in protective detention from 12 November to 15 December 1938⁴¹. He filed an application for emigration to Palestine in February 1939 but was rejected. To save his wife, he divorced in September 1939. He was deported to Nisko upon San on 26 October 1939 as part of the second Vienna transport. On arrival, he was expelled together with other prisoners to a nearby small community where they stayed for about three weeks. Then on 4 December 1939 he illegally crossed the border to the USSR. He made it to Lvov where he lived for the subsequent seven months. He underwent training to be a barber and tried to obtain a permit to emigrate to Palestine again. However, the NKVD arrested him in Lviv on 4 July 1940 on the grounds of his illegal stay on the territory of the USSR. He was sent to the Volgograd near Rybinsk in the Yaroslavl Oblast. Otto Fränkel was only sentenced in April 1942 for five years in penitentiary labour camps as a socially dangerous element. His subsequent whereabouts are not known.⁴²



A summons to O. Fränkel by the Jewish Community in Vienna including the place and time of the transport to Nisko upon San

Photo: DALO

All photos of the detained refugees from the Nisko camp come from the State Archive in Lvov and the Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine in Kiev

Deportations to Nisko upon San in the recollections of the survivors

Over the course of the past several years, members of the ÚSTR Oral History Group recorded the personal recollections of three people deported to Nisko upon San who had hailed from pre-war Czechoslovakia. By coincidence, all of them were included in the same transport – the second one that left Ostrava for Nisko on 26 October 1939 at 7 p.m. Bedřich Seliger was deported together with four hundred other Jewish prisoners.⁴³ After a few hours' ride, the transport stopped in Katowice where it was coupled to several dozen cars with a thousand Jews on board, concentrated from the various corners of the Nazi-occupied Upper Silesia region. The other prisoners included Oton Windholz⁴⁴ from Ustroń and Leopold Presser⁴⁵ from Těšín. The following pages contain excerpts from their recollections.⁴⁶ The great majority of the deportees who came on this transport did not stay in the Zarzecze camp, which was under construction, but were driven to the nearby German-Soviet demarcation line by the Nazi guards who forced them to cross over to the Soviet (formerly Polish) territory. Since the guarding of the camp was negligent, many of the few prisoners who stayed in or near the camp temporarily fled for the USSR in the upcoming days or weeks.

This is why the witnesses' recollections of the Zarzecze camp are rather limited and focus primarily on describing the escape to the USSR and the internment in the NKVD camps. As part of a reminder of the anniversary of the deportations to Nisko upon San, passages describing the developments beginning with the transport to Nisko and ending with the deportations to the labour camps in the USSR after arrest by the NKVD were excerpted from the interviews (B. Seliger's recollections end with the departure to the Soviet territory in search of a job).

Bedřich Seliger was born in Prostějov on 19 June 1920. His father made his living as a ready-to-wear clothes retailer and his mother was a housewife with three children. Following primary school, Bedřich studied at the Prostějov High School and graduated in 1938. While still a student he got involved in socialist youth activities and formed an informal socialist club with his schoolmates. They met even after the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. Although Bedřich's parents tried hard to get their son from the Protectorate to the UK, he never left. On a false accusation of keeping Marxist literature at home, Bedřich Seliger was arrested by the Gestapo in early October 1939 and taken to the prison in Brno's Špilberk Castle. Two months later, he and other Jewish prisoners were deported to Ostrava.

Leopold Presser (Yehuda Parma today) was born in Jasenieca in Poland near the Czech-Polish border on 31 July 1922 and he grew up in Český Těšín. He and his siblings went to a Czech primary school and were involved in the Český Těšín Makkabi association and the Boy Scouts. He went on to study at the Český Těšín High School. When Poland claimed the Czechoslovak part of the Těšín area during the Munich crisis, the boys from several youth organisations in Český Těšín were involved in setting up border patrols. Leopold Presser was a member of a patrol

guarding the border by the River Olše (Olza). This is why he and dozens of other students were ejected from the high school following the Polish occupation of the Czech part of the Těšín Region ("Zaolží") in October. He decided to seek his elder brother Egon in Ostrava. He participated in Aliyat Noar, an organisation that prepared for the emigration of Jewish people to Palestine while working at a steel mill. When the Nazi forces arrived in Ostrava on 14 March 1939 he was dismissed immediately on the grounds of his Jewish origins and struggled to return to his parents in Těšín. World War II broke out in September 1939 and Nazi troops quickly invaded the Těšín area. Shortly thereafter, Leopold with his father Artur and other Těšín Jews were included in a transport to Nisko upon San.

Oton Windholz (his current name is **Otto Winecki**) was born on 29 March 1923 in Ustroń in Poland near the Czechoslovak border; his mother came from Michálkovice near Ostrava where he would often go to visit his relatives as a child. As elsewhere on the Polish territory occupied by the Nazis, all men aged sixteen to sixty in Ustroń had to report for forced labour – cleaning walkways, landscaping, digging army trenches and so forth. After several weeks of exhausting and humiliating work, Otto Windholz with his brother and father were included in a transport to Nisko upon San.

TRANSPORT TO NISKO UPON SAN

B. Seliger: *One fine day, a Nazi officer came to our dormitory (cell) and told us to write back home immedi-*

ately for them to send us suitcases with winter stuff – underwear, shoes and so on because we would relocate for labour deployment. So we wrote the letters. My mum sent me a really

big suitcase. There was a winter coat, shoes, lots of underwear and sweaters in it. Then they took us to Ostrava on flatbed trucks as was customary back in the day. They put us on a train in

Ostrava but we did not know where we were going.

O. Winecki: The Judenrat in Ustroń told us to pack up and be ready at five in the morning. We could take one suitcase each and they took us to Bielsko because the railway bridge in Skoczów had been destroyed by the retreating Polish army. They took us to Bielsko on horse-drawn carriages. A train was sidelined there; we heard it had come from Ostrava. It was a long train and it was full of, shall we say, passengers – other Jews from Ostrava and around. They put us on the train, and it was still a normal train with passenger carriages.

We arrived in Katowice and they put everyone into factory (cargo) cars, about fifty people in one car. The transport included our relatives from Český Těšín and Ostrava, friends from Ustroń and from Těšín, Bielsko, Jablunkov, Mosty u Jablunkova and Bohumín. My father's family was large – he was one of seven siblings. But my mother's grandfather in Michálkovice had thirteen children.

Y. Parma: A Gestapo order came in October to the effect that all Jews aged 16 to 60 had to come to the main station in Těšín on 26 October with backpacks, personal belongings, clothes and food for three days. We all came there at seven a.m. It was horrible – hundreds of Jewish families came to the station to see their children and husbands off. My father was 48 and I was 17. My mother, brothers and sister all came to say goodbye. It was very moving. That was the last time I ever saw some of them. They stuffed maybe fifty people to every car, we were stuck like fish in a can and you couldn't move. There was hay on the floor and one bucket for a toilet. There were small air vents on top but it stank in there. Then we went to Bielsko and then to Katowice. About a thousand Jews in all, not only from Český Těšín but also from Bohumín etc. The Nazis wanted to purge the area of Jews but took only men for the time being. Women and children stayed. It was a big worry for everyone but I didn't understand much of what was going on. [...] The train stopped by a field, the doors opened and the Nazis ordered us

to get off. We had to stand in a row, face to the train, drop our trousers and then they ordered us to shit – to defecate. Everybody was surprised if someone actually succeeded in doing so. That was so humiliating. Today you cannot understand how they could treat us so inhumanely.

NISKO – ZARZECZE CAMP

O. Winecki: SS men were waiting for us on the platform. They opened the doors and one or two would walk car to car with a cap and say: "Wer mit dem lieben Herr Gott nicht näher Freundschaft machen wird, soll das Gold und Geld abgeben", which meant "if you don't want to meet your Maker right now, hand over all of your money, jewels and gold." They collected it in the caps. Then they unloaded us. Luggage – suitcases and backpacks – were in the first two or three carriages. They put them on horse-drawn carts and herded us towards the San. We lost two suitcases in the hurry. A pontoon bridge was set up on the San at the time because the railway bridge was defunct. Then we came to the camp in Nisko. At that time, though, there was no camp at all yet, there was something like one house and two or three wooden huts. We spent the night there, sleeping on the ground.

B. Seliger: We were lucky in the camp in that we were guarded by Wehrmacht soldiers who celebrated the victory over Poland, the successful Blitzkrieg every day. There were some provisional huts already that we lived in. We didn't know how it would be when real frosty weather would come; we were confused. And nothing happened for quite some time there, though we worked pretty hard; we levelled the ground and cleared trees including the roots. We worked really hard physically. There were about two to three hundred of us. Not just from Ostrava but also from Brno, Prague and so on. They needed mostly young people who could tackle the work. In fact, they selected only young people for this slavery back in Brno, and only if an old man had made his bed incorrectly or something they picked him too as a punishment.

Y. Parma: When we reached Nisko my father and I found that this was the second transport and that my brother was included in the first transport from Ostrava. When we came to Nisko [the camp by the village of Zarzecze near Nisko] no huts were ready yet; they were still under construction. We saw a lot of mess around there, which was strange for Germans. So the group that I was in with my father relocated to the nearby village of Jaroczyn. We would do basically nothing there. Older and more experienced men knew or learned from the locals or from the Polish army deserters that we were close to the Soviet border; that there was a river there; and that the Soviet Army was on the other side. We decided not to stay under the Nazis and to try to flee instead.

ESCAPE TO THE USSR

B. Seliger: We were virtually unguarded. A conversation between Nazi guards – they talked quite loudly – revealed that some prisoners had indeed fled. When they started bringing in wire mesh fences, barbed wire and so on, basically everyone understood that we were about to build our own concentration camp. At the time, we had quite a few opportunities to meet, have a chat and try to guess what would happen next. I joined such a group of six. I didn't know any of them, not even by name – they must have been from Ostrava. We agreed that when a clear night came we would pack up our suitcase and leave because basically no one was guarding us. And that clear night came once. One man in the group told us to pack up and leave sometime between one and two in the morning when the Nazis would be fast asleep. So we did. That was after about two months in the camp, shortly before Christmas 1939.

We knew we had to go east. We had no problem maintaining our direction based on the azimuth. Then we came to a wide road and when the morning came we were surprised to find that we were not alone there – people just kept flowing in both directions. We dropped into a group – part Poles and part Ukrainians, carrying some things from their homes for their relatives in Lviv.



Bedřich Seliger, Teplice 2011

Photo: Přemysl Filaka

They knew who we were; there was no point keeping it secret. They said they had met others like us – we were not the first. They told us the border was not far away. We walked tens of kilometres through no-man’s land between the Soviets and the Nazis. Then we saw a Nazi patrol. We knew that if they were from our camp they could be after us and that we would die – that was a certainty. When they came close we found they were not from our camp. One Pole who spoke decent German took out his documents. None of us had any documents on us. He explained that we were all coming from this village and going to see our relatives. We had been there several times before and we still had some stuff on this side of the line. At that moment, insane fear took hold of me – what if anyone in our group betrays us? A Ukrainian or a Pole – they all knew we were Jews and no Ukrainians or Poles loved Jews very much. But no one spoke – not a peep. Maybe the one who spoke to the Nazis had such great authority that no one dared – if they did it would mean sentencing six people to death... there was nothing else to be done, they would shoot us dead right there. So that was the first miracle where I survived, and on it went.

We walked for about eight more kilometres and came to a brook that had almost no water so we could cross it easily. The Pole said we should split into smaller groups and try to cross at various points. We thought that was reasonable. The six of us stayed together as one small group and we set out towards the brook with assurance. Suddenly we saw a plume that Russians wore on their winter caps – we called it the ‘antenna’ – on the other side. Then the Russian soldier got up from his shelter, took out his submachine gun and said: “Go the other way, you are not allowed here.” What could we do – we turned round and hid behind a bush. But we saw that patrols were replaced every few hours. About two hours later, another Russian appeared there, lifted his gun up and waved at us to go. That’s how we crossed the border. He even told us – though we didn’t understand a word of Russian – so he gestured that there was a farm nearby where we could stay overnight. We went to the farm and really, there were some very kind people. We lay on straw and they even gave us a piece of bread and tea. The next day we went to the station from where trains went to Lviv. We got on a train – no tickets, no money, no documents – nobody had

anything. The train started moving and the conductor came. One of us had a piece of paper in his pocket and gave it to him. The conductor took a look, said thank you and gave it back... To this day, I don’t know if he knew what was happening and wanted to help us, or if he was just illiterate and believed that it was a group ticket for six people. The man who gave it to the conductor later told us that it was a coal delivery note. We eventually reached Lviv this way.

Y. Parma: We formed a group, about fifty people. I guess I was the youngest. A German mounted patrol stopped us on our way. There were many people going through at the time so they did not check them thoroughly. They just took some jewellery from us. With the help of some locals we crossed the River Tanev on a boat. That’s how we got to the other side, and there were Soviet soldiers – border guards who captured us. At gunpoint, we had to form a group and never step out of line as we marched. After walking for several kilometres we reached the district town of Sinyava. They accommodated us in a school, gave us water and some soup. But maybe they thought we were spies or traffickers, so they started interrogating each of us. I saw my brother in the school yard the next day. What a surprise it was to reunite with him! He too heard, on arriving in Nisko, that they were going to build a camp there and so he and others fled and reached Sinyava. During the questioning my father showed the investigators his Czechoslovak passport with his children’s names written in it. The Soviet officer treated Czechoslovaks differently. Then they gave us a permit to go to Lviv by train.

O. Winecki: We stayed in Zarzece for one night and we immediately figured out that there was no future for us there. It was not guarded too strictly; the fence was not completed so I went over it and into the forest with my father and brother at night. We walked

through the forest towards the Russian border at night and we would hide in villages in local cottages and farmhouses during the daytime. Right at the border, we met other people from the transport who fled similarly to us. The border between the Soviet and Nazi occupation zones was a river. We didn't know the local terrain but there were Ukrainian traffickers who knew that trafficking refugees across the river was good business. My father paid for the three of us; there were about twenty-five of us in all. We had to wait for two or three days because the nights were clear and the moon was bright. When the moon set, we came to the river and started fording with our luggage on our heads. Suddenly, about four border guards came running on the Russian side with rifles with bayonets and started yelling: "Go back!" On the other side, the German border guards heard it and came too. As they forced us back, one of us who could speak Russian because he had been in captivity in Russia during World War One told them that we didn't care, just shoot because the others [Germans] will shoot too. One of our men was walking back and the Nazis shot him in the middle of the river. He stayed there. The shot attracted an officer of the Russian border guard. He came over riding a horse and our interpreter told him to let us go to their side because we were running away from those murderers. He then ordered his men to let us in. They took us to the border guard station and then they took us to the prison in Sinyava the next day. We were there for a day or two, and then they told us: "Get lost! Don't ever come back!" So we walked to the train station and left for Lviv.

LIV

B. Seliger: The situation in Lviv was abnormal - so many refugees. The number of people there may have tripled or so. Luckily, the help for refugees was organised perfectly. Not only did they give us food - they also gave us a small amount of money and a card. It



was not an official identity document, just a card of the helping organisation. I was lucky in that I met a man who asked who I was. He was a Jew and when he found that I had completed a piano course, he told me that they had an upright piano at home and that I should come for lunch and pay them back by teaching their daughter to play the piano. He wrote the address down for me. I came there the next day, had a wonderful lunch like no other refugee had, and then I would do this three times a week. On the other days I ate at the organisation where I was registered and slept in a school.

Posters appeared in the town, saying that refugees would be registered by the security authorities - the NKVD. The posters contained the initial letters of surnames with a date and place to report to. So, under the letter S, I got my address to come to and the date. There was this typical Russian - tall and fat, and his rank was Major. He told me to complete several forms. Since I did not know the Cyrillic script then, he generously offered to complete them for me. My place and date of birth, my education, my father's, mother's and sisters' occupations and who knows what else he wrote down. Then he asked what my father did. I remember what I said:

"He goes round with goods," as in he was sales representative. The Major said: "Is he a coachman?" I said he was. Suddenly, that gave me a wonderful 'cadre profile' that helped me a lot in the future. All of a sudden, in the middle of the interrogation, he left and came back with a piece of paper and asked: "So you were born and lived in the town of Prostějov?" I said yes. He started asking me who had the biggest photography studio in Prostějov, so I said "Ševčík". Who has a bookstore near the town hall? I said the name. And, what street is the court in? Havlíčkova, of course - our house was less than a hundred metres from the court house. He said: "Correct." He cross-checked if I told the truth to make sure I was not an agent. But I did convince him and the result was that he told me to come back in two weeks to collect an ID and to bring two photographs. Based on that interrogation, I got a pass authorising me to stay on the territory of the USSR and get a job. That was immensely important.

Y. Parma: Lviv was a big city but it was utterly overcrowded with refugees at the time. You could not get lodging anywhere. In addition, it was tough winter back then, with temperatures

of ten, maybe fifteen below zero, and we were exhausted. Eventually we got to Rahodemitska Street, which had dorms for students and academia members. The floor of the hall was occupied but we found a spot. My brother and I lay down under the piano and we could push my father to the wall. Luckily it was warm in there. But when we tried to get up we would hit our heads on the piano.

We started looking for a job. There was a centre where refugees would gather – the passage of the Café de la Paix; there were black marketers there and you could sell or buy all sorts of things. You could get food there too. There was a tough winter coming so we decided to go from house to house and help out with firewood. We bought a saw and an axe and peddled our work around, and got food instead of money in exchange. We could not speak Russian so we started learning, and for the time being we would just gesture. We got by day by day. Then another surprise came. We met our sister at the Café de la Paix passage one day; she had fled to Poland with her boyfriend. That changed our position, because they had come to Lviv at the beginning of the war and by now they had a room in Litshakova [Street]. That's where we started working, helping out with firewood – most often for Poles. Then, as Czechoslovaks, we got job permits and I could join a bakery as an apprentice, even though I knew nothing about baking. We gradually got used to living in Lviv. My brother worked the saw and also in Yadze in the alcohol factory as a warehouse worker. Lviv was packed so some of the refugees from Nisko went on to Stanislavov and various other towns in Ukraine. We were no longer in touch with them, but we met some refugees from the transport in the passage de la Paix. Like our friend from Český Těšín, Josef Turs who was one year younger than me. He was arrested as a spy and sentenced to prison in Lviv. He then managed to prove that he was a refugee, a Jew and a Czechoslovak, and he was released. When he came back I didn't recognise him – he was just skin and bones – but he recovered. I was an optimist, trying to look on the bright side of it despite all the bad things.

O. Winecki: We came to the NKVD in Lviv as refugees. We got a room from a local Jew near St Anthony's Square. Our father started working and we the boys had no idea what to do, so we just lazed around. Sometime in April, a German military repatriation committee came and set up office in Lviv. They said that whoever of the refugees currently in Lviv wanted to go back to their relatives on the German side could register with the committee. Since our father's wife stayed in Ustroń as did all of our other relatives, our father registered with the committee and said we wanted to return. After a few weeks, it became known that the German repatriation committee gave all the lists of the people who applied to return to the German side to the NKVD. As a result, the NKVD had its work done for it because they got all personal information – addresses and everything. So the NKVD action started. They would come to people at night and put them on trucks. They took them to the station, put them on trains and the trains went east. We hid for several weeks. Our father worked in a factory and there was a grain warehouse. So we hid in the warehouse for two or three weeks.

ARREST

O. Winecki: Then we found that all our friends from the Těšín region and Ostrava had been taken away already, and my father concluded that there was no point keeping on hiding – they would find us anyway eventually. So we were at home, bags packed, and they came knocking on our door at two in the morning: "This is the NKVD!" We weren't surprised, really, because we were prepared. They took us on board a truck and then to the NKVD. We stayed there overnight. They never interrogated or tried us – there was no trial. Nothing. My father had registered for returning to Germany, which they understood to mean he hated the USSR. The Russian for it was "Ne blagonadyozhnyi" [Not desirable]. They simply assumed that all these people were potential enemies to the Soviet Union so they should better be kept in Siberia instead of on the then border with Germany. Trucks came the next morning and took our entire group to

the station. A train of cargo cars was prepared there and we boarded. We left Lviv sometime in the evening. We rode for seven or eight days towards the River Irtysh where they put us on a boat. Or was it Tobol? I can't remember. So they took us to Tobolsk. From there we sailed down the Tobol, Ob and Konda to a NKVD labour camp near Khanty-Mansiysk. When we came ashore and they lined us up by the river, our NKVD man Shulov told us: "This is your Poland, this is your Warsaw. Get used to it. If you don't, you will die."

Y. Parma: There was action all the time. They would send entire families to Siberia. The Soviets suspected every refugee of being a spy. Our time came in the summer. The militia came at night and banged on the door. They ordered us to get dressed, take our luggage and follow them. We protested saying that we had a permit to stay and work, that we were Czechs – Czechoslovak nationals. They answered: "Never mind, never mind. We will sort it out there." They put us – the whole family – on trucks and took us to the station. We rode the train for three weeks across the entire Soviet Union; Jews, Poles with various destinies, even Leopold – a Czech from Bohumín. They gave us food every time they refilled the locomotive with water. I don't remember what it was – maybe soup. Then we went on to the north. Once we were told that we'd had our lunch at midnight. But it was day – it was not dark. Then they put us on a boat on the River Irtysh. We sailed northwards slowly, very slowly. Finally they put us on smaller boats, about thirty people each. We went for one more day until we reached this forced labour camp called Soyma – there were three huts there. They took about fifty people – men and women, all together, plank beds on three levels. The commander welcomed us: "You have come to a colony, a place to work. Just as you never see your ears, you will never see your home again. You will dig the ground, build your houses and then live here." Aside from him there were maybe three or four guards. We later learned that we were maybe a thousand kilometres away from the railway. There were no roads there – just the taiga.



Otto Winecki, Melbourne 2014

Photo: Adam Hradilek

platoon under the Second Infantry Squad led by First Lieutenant Jan Kudlič, Yehuda Parma took part in the first combat action of the First Independent Czechoslovak Battalion in the USSR in March 1943 – in the Battle of Sokolovo where his elder brother Egon was killed. He continued as a reconnaissance soldier of the Czechoslovak military unit until the end of WWII. He stayed in the Czechoslovak Army after the war as a reconnaissance officer and in 1948 he was involved significantly in organising and training Jewish volunteers, with whom he later left for Israel. He briefly worked in the Israeli armed forces and then he was a police officer until retirement. He now lives in a suburb of Tel Aviv.

FURTHER WHEREABOUTS

Bedřich Seliger, unlike most other refugees from Nisko, was fortunate enough to receive a job permit and find a job at a bakery in Bolekhov near Lviv. As a result, he did not face the threat of arrest and subsequent deportation to the Siberian labour camps, as most refugees did. Following the Nazi attack on the USSR in June 1941, he and other civilians were evacuated away from the progressing frontline all the way to Tashkent, Uzbekistan where he worked in a cooperative for several months. Late in 1941 he read in a newspaper that the Czechoslovak military unit was being formed in Buzuluk and decided to join it immediately – in fact, he was one of the first six soldiers to enlist in Buzuluk. As the war went on, he took the entire journey of our eastern unit as the commander of a mine launcher team (he was injured three times). He was the commander of a mine launcher team during the Battle of the Dukla Pass. During the war his entire family perished in Nazi concentration camps.

Bedřich Seliger was employed at the military headquarters in Olomouc until 1947. When he left the military

he settled in Teplice and worked in managerial positions in lacework and textiles factories and glassworks in Western and Northern Bohemia. He died on 27 November 2012.

Yehuda Parma reunited with almost all of the members of his family in the Soviet labour camp – his sister and cousin and their husbands arrived with the next transport. All Polish nationals including about three hundred Polish Jews were released from the camp in June 1941, but the commander refused to release Czechoslovak nationals, despite the amnesty. As a result, during a New Year's Eve celebration, several men decided to flee with the help of "kulaks" living in exile in the camp's vicinity. Then they enlisted at the local military headquarters in the town of Khanty-Mansiysk some thirty kilometres away from the camp. Except for Leopold's father, they were all recognised as eligible for military service and were allowed to leave for Buzuluk where they arrived in early February 1942. It took one year to get the rest of the family to Buzuluk. The father died as a result of physical exhaustion shortly after arrival. As a member of a reconnaissance

Otto Winecki was released from the Verchniye baraki penitentiary colony near Khanty-Mansiysk under the amnesty for Polish nationals announced after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941. He was sent to work at a cooperative farm and his brother Alfred worked on a construction site. His father Josef was seriously injured while performing forest work and hospitalised in Khanty-Mansiysk. Otto and his brother applied for release to the newly formed Polish military force in the USSR and were released in November 1943. They joined the artillery unit but Otto was sent to a military academy in May 1944. On returning home, he found that most of his relatives had been murdered in Auschwitz. He stayed in the Polish military until 1947, then worked at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He stayed in Prague with his family between 1960 and 1965 as an official of Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Due to another surge of anti-Semitism in Poland in the late 1960s, he fled with his family to Vienna and then to Australia in May 1968. He died on 26 November 2015 in Melbourne.

NOTES

- 1 Quite a lot of attention has been paid to the transports of Jews to Nisko upon San in domestic and international literature. The Nisko Project was the subject of two international conferences and several historical papers and studies. In this context, we should mention Nesládková, L. (ed.) (1995). *Akce Nisko v historii „konečného řešení židovské otázky“ – k 55. výročí první hromadné deportace evropských Židů. Mezinárodní vědecká konference. Sborník referátů*. Ostrava: Rondo. For international authors, the works by Seev Goshen, an Israeli historian and a participant in the first Ostrava transport, should be mentioned: Goshen, S. (1981). Eichmann und die Nisko-Aktion im Oktober 1939. Eine Fallstudie zur NS-Judenpolitik in der letzten Etappe vor der „Endlösung“. *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Jahrgang 29, Heft 1, 74–96; Goshen, S. (1992). Nisko – Ein Ausnahmefall unter den Judenlagern der SS. *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, Jahrgang 40, Heft 1, 95–106. Of Czech studies, those written by Mečislav Borák should be mentioned: Borák, M. (1994). *Transport do tmy. První deportace evropských Židů*. Ostrava: Akciová společnost Moravskoslezský den; Borák, M. (2009). *První deportace evropských Židů. Transporty do Niska nad Sanem (1939–1940)*. Ostrava – Šenov u Ostravy: Český svaz bojovníků za svobodu, městský výbor v Ostravě – Tilia; Borák, M. (2010). *The First Deportation of the European Jews. The Transports to Nisko nad Sanem (1939–1940)*. Opava – Šenov u Ostravy: Slezská univerzita Opava – Tilia.
- 2 Nazi Germany and the USSR divided Poland between them under a secret protocol based on the known Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, i.e., a treaty of non-aggression between Nazi Germany and the communist USSR signed by the two mentioned Ministers of Foreign affairs of the respective countries in Moscow on 23 August 1939.
- 3 The final decision on the administration of the occupied Polish territory was eventually made by Hitler himself – the “Edict of the Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor concerning Organization and Administration of Eastern Territories” of 8 October 1939 took effect on 26 October and ended the period of military administration on the occupied territory. New districts were made in the Greater German Reich – Reichsgau West Prussia (later Danzig-West Prussia) and Poznan (Warthegau), and the Silesia Province was formed from Lower and Upper Silesia. The rest of Poland became the General Government.
- 4 Regarding the solution to the Jewish question on Nazi-occupied territories, newer publications include Gruner, W. – Osterloh, J. (eds.) (2010). *Das „Grossdeutsche Reich“ und die Juden. Nationalsozialistische Verfolgung in den angegliederten Gebieten*. Frankfurt am Main – New York: Campus Verlag.
- 5 Borák (2009), 48–49.
- 6 On Vienna transports, for more cf. Moser, J. (1989). Nisko. Ein geplantes Judenreservat in Polen. In: *Das Jüdische Echo*, Bd. 120, Nr. 36. Wien: Verein zur Herausgabe der Zeitschrift „Das Jüdische Echo“, 118–122; Dvořák, J. (2012). Směr Nisko nad Sanem: první organizované deportace Židů z Vídně. *Historica. Revue pro historii a příbuzné vědy*, year 3, issue 1, 44–57.
- 7 Borák, M. Příprava a průběh niských transportů. In: Nesládková (1995), 100.
- 8 Borák (2009), 60.
- 9 Borák (in Nesládková, 1995), 101–102.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 102–103.
- 11 Moser (1989), 120.
- 12 Borák (2009), 104–105.
- 13 Surviving documents indicate that 70 men from Nový Bohumín, 60 from Orlová and 28 from Třinec were detained and transported “to Polish territory” (i.e., to Nisko) on 26 or 27 October. *State District Archive in Karviná*, collection Nový Bohumín Town Archive, box 14, inventory unit. 123, List of Deported Jews made on 21 November 1939; *State District Archive in Frýdek-Místek*, collection Třinec Town Archive, box 11, inventory unit 96, List of Jews in Třinec, 16 September 1939.
- 14 Moser (1989), 121.
- 15 Dvořák (2012), 53.
- 16 On the third Ostrava transport, see more in Přibyl, L. (2000). Osud třetího protektorátního transportu do Niska. In: Kárný, M. – Lorencová, E. (eds.). *Terezínské studie a dokumenty*. Prague: Academia, 309–346.
- 17 Borák (2009), 100.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 132.
- 19 Moser (1989), 121.
- 20 Borák (2009) 172–173.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 119.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 23 Moser (1989), 121–122.
- 24 Dvořák, J. – Hradílek, A. (2013). Perzekuce československých Židů v Sovětském svazu za druhé světové války. *Historie – Otázky – Problémy*, year 5, issue 1, 106.
- 25 Borák (2009), 126.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 221.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 229.
- 28 Dvořák (2012), 56.
- 29 *State Archive of Lviv Oblast* (Derzhavnyi arkhiv Lvivskoy oblasti – hereinafter “DALO”), collection Kriminalnye spravy – (1939–1950), collection code P-3258, vol. 16694.
- 30 *Ibid.*, vol. 18175.
- 31 Roland, H. (1943) *Váleční zajatci vypovídají. Podle úředních dokumentů sestaveno z příkazu Německého státního ministerstva pro Čechy a Moravu*. Prague: Orbis.

- 32 DALO, collection Kriminalnye spravy - (1939-1950), P-3258, vol. 8671.
- 33 *Archive of Ukraine Security Service in Kiev* (Sluzhba Bezpeky Ukrainy - "SBU"), collection Kriminalnye spravy (1939-1950), vol. 2382.
- 34 Ibid, vol. 2293.
- 35 *Yad Vashem Archive in Jerusalem*, gr. 0.59, collection No. 101, Marek Mordko Neuer.
- 36 SBU, collection Kriminalnye spravy (1939-1950), vol. 3598.
- 37 Cf. <http://www2.holocaust.cz/cz/victims> (quoted as of 13 November 2014).
- 38 DALO, collection Kriminalnye spravy - (1939-1950), P-3258, vol. 8823.
- 39 *KZ Gedenkstätte Dachau*, NARA Zugangsbuch Nr. 105/24866.
- 40 DALO, collection Kriminalnye spravy - (1939-1950), P-3258, vol. 9959.
- 41 *KZ Gedenkstätte Dachau*, NARA Zugangsbuch Nr. 104/23327.
- 42 DALO, collection Kriminalnye spravy - (1939-1950), P-3258, vol. 9919.
- 43 *Collection of Interviews of Oral History Group ("SOH") ÚSTR*, Interview with Bedřich Seliger, recorded by Jan Dvořák, 4 October 2011.
- 44 Ibid., Interview with Otto Winecki, recorded by Adam Hradilek, 27 August 2014.
- 45 Ibid., Interview with Yehuda Parma, recorded by Jan Dvořák, 28 October 2011.
- 46 The interview transcript was slightly edited for this article. The literary transcript is available in the SOH Archive.

A request for rehabilitation sent by K. Rosenzweig from Bugulma in Tatarstan to a court in Lvov in 1988
Photo: DALO

44-90к-17

Республиканская прокуратура УССР

Уважаемые товарищи!

Прошу оказать содействие в расследовании моего, с моей точки зрения, незаконного ареста и заключения в 1940-44 гг.

Я проживал до 1939 года на территории Чехословакии. В этом году после начала германской войны я был в 16-летнем возрасте вместе с другими евреями выслан немецко-фашистскими властями на советскую границу. Остальные члены моей семьи были в последствии уничтожены в концлагере Освенцим.

В конце ноября 1939 я в составе большой группы беженцев перешел границу СССР в районе Свѣцьяны Львовской области. После допроса работником НКВД и обыска мне, как и другим, было предложено покинуть пограничную зону в течение суток. Добравшись до ближайшей ж.д. станции Рава-Русская, я уехал во Львов. Там был размещен в общежитии для беженцев по адресу Старый Рынок, 30 в бывшей школе танцев.

27 июня 1940 года ночью вместе со всеми проживавшими там беженцами был арестован работниками НКВД и после трехнедельного содержания под стражей (в приспособленной для этого школе), без каких либо объяснений был отправлен в Беломорско-Балтийский лагерь. В 1941 году после начала войны был переправлен в Каргопольлаг Архангельской области.

В 1942 году мне было объявлено, что решением тройки НКВД я осужден за нелегальный переход госграницы по соответствующей статье УК УССР к трем годам лишения свободы. Однако был освобожден только в июне 1944 года, т.е. через почти четыре года.

С этого времени я проживаю в Татарской АССР, получив по моей просьбе советское гражданство в 1947 г.

Прошу проверить указанные факты с целью пересмотра дела и реабилитации.

С уважением

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25/XI 1988 г.