

# INTRODUCTION

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On December 5, 1982, an Israeli citizen, Avraham Tory, arrived in Tampa, Florida, from Israel. With him he brought his diary from the years 1941–1944, when he had lived in Lithuania, in the Kovno Ghetto, where the Germans had incarcerated more than thirty thousand Jews. On trial in Tampa was a naturalized U.S. citizen, Kazys Palciauskas, who was accused of having entered the United States shortly after World War II on a false declaration. In July 1941, Palciauskas had been mayor of Kovno, appointed to that position by the German occupation forces, and had acted with the Germans in the mass murder of tens of thousands of Jews. At the time of his entry to the United States, he had failed to mention his wartime position to U.S. immigration authorities.

At the outset of his trial, Palciauskas denied that he had ever been mayor of Kovno. Avraham Tory had come to show that this denial was false, for Tory's diary, about to be presented to the court, was a full, often day-to-day, account, written at the time, of the fate of the Jews of Kovno, including the part Palciauskas had played in their destruction.

The diary Tory had brought to Tampa was the original, written in Yiddish in the Kovno Ghetto. Before his journey to the United States it had been authenticated by four survivors of the Ghetto. The first was Lucia Elstein-Lavon, who had been Tory's secretary in the Ghetto throughout the period during which he had written the diary. She, too, was present at the trial in Tampa. The second was Zvi Levin, a leader of the Zionist underground in wartime Kovno, and one of the very few who not only had known about the diary at the time but had regularly seen it being written. The third was Shraga Goldsmith, the head of the repair workshops in the Ghetto, who had prepared the five wooden crates in which the pages of the diary had been hidden. Goldsmith had personally dug the hiding places, and, with Tory, secreted the crates under the concrete foundations of the uncompleted three-story building that housed his repair workshop. The fourth was Esther Lourie, a painter who had made sketches of many Ghetto inmates and scenes at Tory's request. The four authentications had been made in the form of solemn declarations in conformity with the law of the State of Israel.

Confronted by the facts set out in the diary, Palciauskas admitted that he had been mayor. In April 1984, after a series of appeals, he was found guilty, and his American citizenship was revoked. Since then, the Soviet Union has sought his extradition. The case is (in 1989) before the United States Supreme Court.

Within two years of Avraham Tory's journey to Florida, he left Israel again for another trial, this time in Toronto. Once more he took his diary with him. On trial was Helmut Rauca, the former Gestapo official who had been in charge of the Jewish desk at the Gestapo headquarters in Kovno. In court, Rauca denied that he had been in Lithuania between 1941 and 1943, claiming that at that time he had been serving as a soldier in Czechoslovakia.

From Tory's diary, it was possible to identify specific days on which Rauca had entered the Ghetto, and what he had done there, including his part in the murder of 10,000 Jews during the "Great Action" of October 28, 1941, which Tory had witnessed. The court accepted the entries in Tory's diary dealing with the Great Action as proof of Rauca's part in it, as well as in other subsequent massacres. Tory also submitted to the court documents Rauca himself had signed while he was in Kovno; these were compared with Rauca's signature on his application for entry into Canada and on his Canadian bank accounts, and were judged to be the same. Rauca was found guilty, his Canadian citizenship was taken away from him, and he was extradited from Canada to Germany, where he died in the Frankfurt am Main prison hospital shortly after having been charged with the murder of more than 11,500 Jews.<sup>1</sup>

More than 30,000 Jews lived in Kovno on the eve of World War II. Theirs was the eighth largest Jewish community in what, from June 1941, was to become the German-occupied area of eastern Poland, White Russia, Lithuania, and the western Soviet Union—one of the principal regions of Jewish life and creativity during the interwar years, and, indeed, since long before World War I.

The Kovno Jewish community was one which prided itself upon both its religious and its secular heritage. Nor was it an isolated community; emigration and overseas education had taken Jews from Kovno to Britain, South Africa, the United States, and Palestine in considerable numbers. Avraham Tory himself had studied at the University of Pittsburgh, and had been a delegate to Zionist Congresses and gatherings in Poland, Palestine, and Switzerland. The

1. The Rauca trial was the third trial at which Tory had been a witness, the first being the trial, in November 1962 at Wiesbaden, West Germany, of Heinrich Schmitz, deputy commander of the Gestapo in Lithuania, and Alfred Tombaum, commander of the Third Division of the German police in Kovno, with responsibility for the Ghetto area. Schmitz committed suicide in his cell before sentence was passed, after hearing Tory's testimony for two full days. Tombaum was acquitted after the court found that there was insufficient evidence to convict him.

children of Dr. Elchanan Elkes, the head of the Jewish Council in the Kovno Ghetto, were both being educated in Britain at the outbreak of the war.

Jews are first known to have lived in Kovno in 1410, when they were brought to the city as prisoners of war by the Grand Duke Vytautas after his victory over the returning Crusaders at the battle of Gruenwald. They were active as traders between Kovno—a Lithuanian market town on the river Nieman—and Danzig, a Hanseatic League port on the Baltic Sea. At the same time, there were also Jews living across the river from Kovno, in Vilijampolé—a suburb known to the Jews as Slobodka. It was in Slobodka, which had been a Jewish village for four hundred years, that, on German orders, the Kovno Ghetto was set up in 1941.

For three decades after 1495, because of pressure by Christian merchants, Jews were excluded from the city of Kovno, and from other parts of Lithuania. Throughout those years, however, they continued to live in Slobodka. Jews returned to Kovno during the eighteenth century, but there were two further expulsions from the city, in 1753 and 1761. With each of these expulsions, the suburb of Slobodka increased in size, and also in poverty.

Restrictions on Jewish residence in Kovno were abolished in 1858. From then on, the Jewish populations of Kovno and Slobodka together grew rapidly, rising from 2,000 in 1847 to 25,000 in 1897. In that year, under the rule of the Russian Czar, the Jews of Kovno constituted one-third of the city's total population. By 1908 the number of Jews had risen still further, to 32,000, and to a substantial 40 percent.

It was not only in numbers but in achievement that Kovno's Jews flourished during the nineteenth century. Jewish cultural activity made the city a center of Hebrew writing and literary criticism. In 1863, the first of several *yeshivot*—religious study centers—made Slobodka famous throughout the world of Russian and Eastern European Jewry, and beyond.

Jewish deputies from Kovno were elected to the first and second Duma, held in the Russian capital, St. Petersburg, following the 1905 revolution. In 1909 a conference was held in Kovno to work out a law for the establishment of Jewish community councils throughout Czarist Russia. Jewish schools proliferated, as did Jewish charitable institutions.

In 1915, as the German Army approached Kovno, the Czarist authorities expelled the 32,000 Jews into the interior of Russia. But with German occupation later that year about 9,000 returned.

Following the establishment of an independent Lithuania after the collapse of Czarism, Kovno—from 1919, as Kaunas, the temporary capital of the new state—saw a flowering of Jewish cultural, educational, and economic life. A Ministry of Jewish Affairs was set up in the city, as well as a Jewish National Council for Lithuania, with considerable powers of religious and cultural auton-

omy for the many Jewish communities throughout the country. By 1935 there were four Jewish daily newspapers in Kovno, three of them Zionist and one Bundist, all published in Yiddish. Hebrew schools and Yiddish schools existed side by side. Individual Jews rose to important positions in medicine, and in commerce. Nevertheless, there were limits to what the Jews could aspire to: for example, there were only a very few Jewish judges, and very few Jews were employed in government offices. Nor did a single Jew reach the rank of colonel in the Lithuanian Army, despite many who had served as officers since the founding of the state.

On April 10, 1922, the Lithuanian parliament (the Seimas) abolished the Ministry for Jewish Affairs and the position of Minister for Jewish Affairs. On March 8, 1926, the Jewish National Council was abolished, ending six years of Jewish religious and cultural autonomy in Lithuania.

With the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in June 1940, the days of relative security for Kovno Jewry came to an abrupt end. Jewish life as such was ruined; Jewish institutions were closed down, and Jewish religious and communal life brought to a halt, except for clandestine activity. For the Jews of Kovno, the strength which their Jewish activities and organizations gave them was suddenly and drastically undermined. With the German invasion a year later, disaster followed.

Avraham Tory was born Avraham Golub in the Lithuanian village of Lazdijai in 1909, a subject of the Russian Czar. His father, Zorach Golub, was a graduate of the Volozhin yeshiva and had qualified as a rabbi, although he had never practiced. Tory's mother, Sarah Leah, was the daughter of Jacob and Dobrusa Prusak, farmers who owned their own farm.

Tory (he was to adopt this surname in 1950, three years after his arrival in Israel) was the youngest of six brothers and sisters. His first education was at the *cheder*—a religious elementary school—then at the elementary school which had been established in his village at the end of World War I. By the time he was thirteen, bar mitzvah age, he was already a sports guide with the Maccabi Club and an active member of the General Zionist Youth Movement in Lithuania. Later he continued his studies at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Marijampolė, the district town. This was the first Hebrew high school in Lithuania in which all subjects were taught in Hebrew; Tory graduated from it in 1927. A year later, at the age of 19, he began to study law at university in Kovno.

In 1929, when Nachum Sokolow, then president of the World Zionist Organization, visited Lithuania, Tory served as his escort during the eight days of his visit. A year later Tory went to the United States, to study law at the University of Pittsburgh. Reaching Pennsylvania at the height of the Depression,

he supported himself by working as a Hebrew teacher in a school for Jews who had immigrated from Hungary.

Tory remained in the United States for a year and a half. Then, after the sudden death of his father in Lazdijai, he returned at his mother's request to Lithuania, where he continued his law studies in Kovno.

Tory's travels were not over, however. In the spring of 1932, he went to Palestine as the head of the Maccabi sports team from Lithuania, participating as a gymnast in the first Maccabiah Games, which took place in Tel Aviv that April. Immediately after the games he represented the Lithuanian Jewish students at a convention of Jewish students from all parts of the world, held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Returning to Kovno to continue his legal studies, Tory was twice head of *Vetaria*, a Zionist student fraternity which had been founded in Kovno in 1924. He and his fellow Zionist students often encountered hostile treatment at the hands of Lithuanian students, as well as from some professors. The cry "Jews, go to Palestine!"—and violent clashes—became more frequent from year to year.

In 1933, the year Hitler came to power in Germany, Tory graduated from the faculty of law at Kovno and was awarded a degree which entitled him both to practice as a lawyer and to serve on the judiciary. In effect, however, the Minister of Justice had practically closed the courts and the district attorneys' offices to Jews, so that Jewish jurists had almost no chance of obtaining a license to practice. A fellow student of Tory's at the faculty of law, a Lithuanian named PENCHILA, who had received the same diploma at the same time as Tory, was appointed judge. He did Tory a "favor" and employed him as practitioner-clerk in his court chambers.

After completing his six-month apprenticeship period with Judge PENCHILA, Tory was engaged as assistant to Professor Simon Bieliatzkin, a leading expert on civil law and one of the few Jewish professors at the University of Lithuania.

Between 1930 and 1939, Tory's Zionist activities and beliefs were reflected in three public positions he held: as a member of the central committee of the Maccabi Sports Association; as deputy chairman of the Hanoar Hazoni Zionist youth movement; and as a member of the central committee of one of the two wings of the General Zionists, the right-wing General Zionist Union.

In March 1939, the national executive of Tory's wing of the General Zionists in Lithuania sent three of its members, among them Tory, as delegates to a convention of Eastern European Zionists in Warsaw. While in Warsaw, Tory also participated in the world executive of the General Zionist Union. Five months later, he traveled to Switzerland as a delegate to the twenty-first Zionist Congress, held that year in Geneva. It was while at the Congress that the delegates learned of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939, one

of the provisions of which, unknown at the time, was the effective control of Lithuania by the Soviet Union.

On September 1, 1939, five days after the Congress opened, the German Army invaded Poland. As the Congress broke up, the delegates from Eastern Europe debated whether to return to their homes or to remain in Switzerland until the storm had passed. Most of the Lithuanian delegates, Tory included, chose to return.

On October 10, 1939, scarcely a month after Tory's return to Kovno, the Soviet Union and Lithuania signed an agreement whereby the Soviet Union could establish military and air bases on Lithuanian soil. These bases came under the authority of the military construction administration of the Supreme Soviet in Moscow. Tory's Zionist work and affiliations could well have led to his deportation to a Siberian or North Russian labor camp; they did lead to his being questioned several times by the NKVD (the predecessor of the KGB). But because of his knowledge of the Russian, German, Lithuanian, and Yiddish languages, he was eventually given work by the Soviet military construction administration. His job was to prepare its financial and accounting reports for dispatch to the Baltic main office in Riga. He was also able to find work at the administration for a number of his friends, among them Shimon Bregman, a refugee from Poland and an active member of the General Zionist youth movement (after the war to become a professor of geriatrics at Tel Aviv University) and Izia Dillion, the former head of the Betar Revisionist movement in Lithuania, who was shortly to be deported to Siberia, where he died.

Tory worked for five months at the military construction administration before being forced to leave on account of his alleged "dark past" as a Zionist, the "counterrevolutionary" nature of which even his competent work could not negate. In vain did he search for work. "The Soviet Russians did not know me," he later wrote, "and were suspicious of me. The Lithuanians hated Jews and rejoiced at their troubles." Tory knew from his brother-in-law, Benjamin Romanovski—a high official in the Soviet government of Lithuania—that he was on the list of those to be deported to Siberia, and expected to be arrested at any moment. "Tell us what plots you and Dr. Weizmann have concocted against the Soviet Union," he was asked, again and again, under interrogation by the NKVD in Kovno. Fearful of deportation, Tory left Kovno for Vilna, where he was in hiding during the last weeks of Soviet rule in Lithuania. Then, on June 22, 1941, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, "and I went"—Tory later recalled—"from the frying pan into the fire."<sup>2</sup>

2. A. Tory-Golub, "My Personal Experiences in the Soviet Military Administration 'Glav-Vojenstroy' in Lithuania," typescript, 10 pp., no date.

Tory's diary tells the story of that "fire." Its first entry was written at midnight on the day of the German invasion. That same day, in Kovno, several hundred Jews were seized by the Lithuanian mob and murdered. On June 23, the German Army entered the city. In the diary, the story of the life and fate of the Jews of Kovno during the war years emerges in stark detail. Tory's writing, often done late at night, combines the emotion of an eyewitness to destruction with the determination of that same eyewitness to record facts, figures, and details as precisely as possible.

From the principal European Ghettos set up by the Germans, several diaries and collections of documents survive; many others are known to have been destroyed. The three largest existing sets of contemporary records are those of the Warsaw Ghetto, collected by Emanuel Ringelblum and his "Joy of Sabbath" circle, the archives of the Bialystok Ghetto, and the chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto, a daily digest of events compiled by members of the Jewish Council there. A similar collection for Lvov, carefully collected and guarded by a group of dedicated Jewish historians, is thought to have been lost. Material also survives for the Minsk and Vilna Ghettos, including diaries and documents; the same is true of a number of the smaller Ghettos. In the main, however, only a tiny fragment of what was written at the time survived the war, or has yet been recovered.

Avraham Tory's is one of the longest and fullest of the surviving diaries. It is also the only one which (with the exception of the story of the successful struggle within the Ghetto to conceal the existence of typhus) was penned without inhibition. This frankness is particularly valuable regarding the otherwise largely unrecorded discussions between the Jewish Council and the German authorities from whom that Council received its orders and instructions.

On July 10, 1941, two senior Lithuanian officials—the mayor, Palciauskas, and the city's military commander, Colonel Bobelis—announced by decree that a Ghetto was to be established across the river from Kovno in the suburb of Slobodka, known to the Lithuanians since 1918 as Viliampolė. In 1941 about 6,000 of Kovno's 35,000 Jews lived there, most of them in conditions of considerable poverty. The majority of Kovno's Jews lived in the city itself, from which, in July and August 1941, they were expelled and sent to Slobodka. Five days before the uprooting began, all Jews were ordered to wear a yellow "Shield of David" (also known as the Star of David) on the left side, and also on the back, of their coats. Anyone not wearing such a badge would be arrested. The Jews were also ordered to create a Jewish police force to keep order within the Ghetto.

# 1941

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*The creation of the Kovno Ghetto: Jews forced to leave the city for the suburb of Viliampolė (Slobodka) in August 1941.*



## **JUNE 22, 1941<sup>1</sup>**

It was a sunny Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, in the provisional capital of Lithuania.<sup>2</sup> Most factories and public institutions were closed. Resting in their homes, the toils of the past week behind them, the city's residents woke up to a bitter surprise: instead of the usual diet of light music, the radio was broadcasting unusual and ominous news from Moscow; last night German warplanes had carried out bombing raids on Alytus, Kedainiai, Siauliai, Kovno, and Riga, as well as on scores of army camps in the Baltic countries and in other republics of the Soviet Union. At a number of points, German troops had attacked the Red Army frontier guards, and had crossed the border into Lithuania, as they had into other territories of the Soviet Union.

War! The news spread quickly in Kovno, as in all parts of the world, this sunny morning. Meanwhile, a number of Lithuanian border towns were already engulfed in flames. Heavy bombing raids carried out by German bombers around Kovno—on the Aleksotas airport, and on the military bases in Sanciai—as well as on the central railway station of Kovno, and on other parts of the town, provided de facto confirmation of the outbreak of war.

The Lithuanians did not conceal their joy at the outbreak of the war: they saw their place on the side of the swastika and expressed this sentiment openly.

The Poles in Kovno, whose families and people had, for the last year and a half, been subject to Nazi rule across the border, did not have any reason to rejoice, whereas the Jews were overcome by despair. They had already gone through the experience of receiving refugees from the no-man's-land into which the Germans had expelled the Jews from occupied Poland, from the Memel region, and from the territories of the Reich, and they began to make preparations to flee.<sup>3</sup> They packed indispensable belongings into knapsacks and began searching for cars or horse-drawn carriages. Some thought it would be better to wait until the following day, when instructions from the authorities would arrive.

Long lines suddenly appeared at the grocery stores. People started hoarding supplies. Others tried to withdraw their savings from banks, but most banks were closed because it was Sunday. The traffic in town was heavy. Crowds of people flocked to the streets to listen to the war news bulletins; to hear what their friends and acquaintances thought of the events, or to meet their relatives.

From time to time, air-raid sirens swept the streets clean of the crowds. Warplanes, with swastikas painted on their wings, appeared, dropped bombs, and

quickly vanished over the horizon. Immediately afterward, the streets were full of people again. In the meantime, a light drizzle began to fall from the cloudy sky.

The Jews were busy packing their belongings.

Toward evening, suspicious Lithuanian characters appeared in the midst of the nervous crowds filling the streets, serving blows to Jewish passers-by. These Lithuanian thugs voiced threats against the Jews: "Hitler will be here before long and will finish you off." That these attacks on the Jews were not accidental is attested by the fact that they took place simultaneously in different parts of town. In fact, it later became clear that the attackers were members of Lithuanian "partisan" gangs, acting on the instructions of the fifth column of the indigenous local Nazis.<sup>4</sup>

During the day, most Jews did not dare to change their daily routine. They went on with their routine work in hospitals, in grocery stores, and in any of the other establishments which were open on Sundays. At the same time, they followed the developments impatiently as confusion and turmoil mounted with each passing hour. In the afternoon, most military institutions began to make preparations for departure. Directors of other public institutions instructed their employees to stay put. They even threatened heavy punishment against those attempting to leave their posts.

The telephone rang incessantly. Colleagues and friends wanted to know: "What should we take with us?" "Where should we flee?" The most acute question was "How?" Trains at the train station were packed, mainly with military personnel. A number of Jews squeezed themselves in. Later the trains were filled with fleeing civilians. They departed in the direction of Latvia, Vilna, or Belorussia.

As I mentioned earlier, most Jews preferred to await instructions from the government and other public institutions. They feared to act on their own and to risk standing trial later for desertion and treason. But quite a few of them marched, bundles on their backs, children at their side, in the direction of the road leading to Vilkomir, in order to find shelter against air raids, until the storm blew over—until the fighting was over and they could return to their homes.

The mood in the city was changing from hour to hour. People were in a quandary: to flee immediately or to wait a little longer, until the situation became clear. Leaving one's place of work carried the penalty of six months' imprisonment. This turned out to be an effective deterrent.

During the night, only a few were able to sleep. German planes bombed the city without respite, driving the residents to seek refuge in air-raid shelters, if such were available. Units of the security forces had already been evacuated from the city. That night something unusual occurred in the main Kovno prison: due to the advance of the enemy, the prison commandant and wardens ran out

of time to evacuate the prisoners and to transport them to Russia, as provided by their contingency plans. The majority of the prisoners were therefore left behind unguarded, although locked inside their cells.

Before long the rumor spread, by means of prisoners' code language, that the guards had disappeared. Shouts were heard: "Comrades, the guards have fled!" A resounding response came from various cells. "The guards are no longer here—break out of the cells!"

1. This entry was written at midnight on June 22, 1941, in the house of Avraham Tory's sister, Batia (Bashel) Romanovski, 8 Maironio Street, Kovno, where the family waited throughout the night for a wagon and two horses, owned by a relative, to take them to Kovno railway station, where they eventually took a train to the Russian border. Some details were added a few days later. It was Tory's habit to write an entry and then later—if possible—to add more details he had learned in the meantime.
2. Vilna (in Polish, Wilno; in Lithuanian, Vilnius) was the capital of Lithuania from the fourteenth century until the end of World War I. In 1920, when Vilna became a part of Poland, Kovno became the Lithuanian capital. Lithuanians repeatedly stressed, however, that this situation was only temporary, until such time as Vilna was returned to Lithuania. In October 1939 Vilna and the province of Vilna were returned to Lithuania within the framework of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, and the Lithuanian government institutions returned there. Despite that, Kovno continued to be called the provisional capital of Lithuania.
3. Several thousand Jews from the independent province of Memel had fled to Lithuania in March 1939, after Memel (in Lithuanian, Klaipeda) was annexed by Germany. These Jewish refugees had been accommodated in Kovno, Vilna, and other towns and given extensive assistance by the Jews of Lithuania. At the same time, Jewish refugees from Germany, as well as from both zones of occupied Poland (German and Soviet), began to arrive in Lithuania; although it is difficult to estimate accurately how many arrived, they probably numbered several tens of thousands.
4. The partisan movement which began to operate behind German lines in 1942, mainly with the assistance of the Soviet Union, is not to be confused with the Lithuanians who called themselves "partisans" immediately after the German invasion in 1941, and who helped the Germans to murder the Jews of Lithuania. These so-called partisans were mostly extreme nationalists, overjoyed at the Soviet withdrawal from Lithuania, who hoped to achieve independence for Lithuania under German auspices.

## **JUNE 23–JULY 7, 1941**

### *MEMOIR*<sup>1</sup>

We feared for the fate of the men if they fell into the hands of the Germans, but we never imagined that they would murder women, children, and the elderly; and so far as the men were concerned, we never expected mass murder. The worst thing we could possibly conceive of was that the men would be drafted as slave laborers. Most elderly persons and women therefore stayed at home, while most of the men fled.

I also tried to escape, together with my sister Batia and her husband, Benjamin Romanovski, a senior official in the Soviet government of Lithuania, who had managed to secure a cart which had not yet been confiscated. While waiting for the cart, and while the bombing continued into the night, I felt a strong compulsion to pour out my heart, so I sat down and put my experiences and thoughts into writing until three in the morning.

The cart reached us long after midnight. We traveled in the direction of the railroad station, through streets bustling with vehicles and with people who were trying to escape. The station was in flames. On the tracks stood wagons filled with Russian soldiers, and with civilians, awaiting a locomotive to take them back to Russia. I myself tried to flee northward on a bicycle. The traffic was heavy. German Messerschmitts strafed the refugees and the Red Army units, which were retreating without putting up any real resistance. I felt like a hunted animal in a forest going up in flames.

I continued, on the bicycle and on foot, from village to village, with no food and almost without sleep, until German bombs destroyed the road between Vilkomir and Utena; houses, utilities, and vehicles had been destroyed for entire kilometers. Soldiers, civilians, and animals had been killed. The escape route was blocked. I had no choice but to retrace my steps back to Kovno.

Meanwhile, the Germans were joined by gangs of Lithuanians, which had sprung up in every forest and village. Most of these gangs were armed. The mass of Jewish refugees making their way back on the highways and dirt roads were easy prey for them. For three long days I wandered on the roads, living from hand to mouth, until, tired and worn out, I reached home. As soon as I returned, I wrote down what I had experienced during my attempted escape, filling about fifty pages.<sup>2</sup>

Upon hearing of the mass murder of Jews in the villages in the vicinity of Kovno, I sent a cart and wagon to my sisters Rivka and Aliza (Eltza), who lived with their husbands and children in Lazdijai, my native village, begging them to come to Kovno. Logic dictated that they would be safer in a large and organized concentration of Jews, but I was plagued by doubts whether this would indeed be so. However, my sisters implored me to come to stay with them, because they believed there was no safety in large towns where most people did not know each other. They later perished together with their husbands, their children, and their whole community.<sup>3</sup> My elder sister, Batia, who left for Russia with her family at the outbreak of fighting, returned to Vilna after the war.

After my return, I found that Jewish Kovno seemed to have disappeared. In terror of murder and torture at the hands of the Lithuanians and the Germans, the Jews hid wherever possible. The situation made action imperative; at the home of the chief rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Duber Kahana-Shapiro,<sup>4</sup> the begin-

nings of a community organization were formed. I also went to the chief rabbi's home, with my friends Israel Bernstein and Elimelech Kaplan.<sup>5</sup> We expressed our readiness to help as much as we could. In spite of our youth, we were willingly accepted.

1. Avraham Tory wrote these notes in the spring of 1945, while he was in Romania, and later in Italy, where he stayed from July 1945 until October 1947 while on his way to Palestine.
2. These pages were lost.
3. Avraham Tory's sister Aliza was killed in Lazdijai, together with her husband, David Kalvariski, and their five-year-old son, Zorah, during a German "action" there in August 1941. Also killed during that "action" were Tory's other sister, Rivka, her husband, Bezalel Becker, their son, Iossi, aged seven, and their daughter, Sheinele, aged five.
4. Abraham Duber (Dov-Ber) Kahana-Shapiro, born in 1870, was the chief rabbi of Kovno at the time of the outbreak of war in June 1941. He died in the Kovno Ghetto in 1943.
5. Israel Bernstein perished in Dachau shortly before the end of the war; Elimelech Kaplan was murdered by Lithuanian so-called partisans during the mass killings of August 6, 1941.

## **JULY 7, 1941<sup>1</sup>**

A warm and sunny July day. Within just a few weeks the city has lost its usual aspect. Not long ago, a mere fifteen days ago, a storm rolled over the place from west to east, instantly uprooting the foundations of order in the country. The earth shook with the heavy air and artillery bombardments, as if flung about by a volcanic eruption.

Two weeks earlier, the Jews in Lithuania were citizens with equal rights. Today—and even as early as ten days ago, two days after the terrible prologue—the Jews have disappeared from the streets and from the life of the city. Now they are cooped up in cellars and other hideouts, trembling at every sound coming from the outside. They fear that death lies in wait for them around every corner.

As early as two weeks ago, bloody battles took place between units of the retreating Red Army and the attacking "brown" German troops assisted by the Lithuanian so-called partisans. The latter fired at the Soviet soldiers from rooftops and from behind the gates of houses. They were assisted by German bombers raining fire and brimstone on the retreating Red Army. The Germans were bent on cutting off the Red Army's retreat to its homeland.

On the same streets and alleys which, just a few days ago, were turned into a bloody battlefield, now a wretched procession takes place: men, women, and children bent under the weight of bundles and parcels. They are in a hurry, fleeing for their lives. On the same streets, Lithuanian partisans, armed to the teeth, march haughtily and brazenly. They appear to think that their time has



*A Ghetto streetcorner: announcements on the walls, business conducted unobtrusively, rumors exchanged.*



*The Ghetto hospital. Because of the shortage of nurses, the sick were tended by relatives. The hospital, set up at the end of 1941, had 80 beds, and in spite of poor conditions, such as a lack of running water, it provided extensive medical care.*

*Rabbi Ephraim Oshri, a distinguished Talmud scholar. His armband says "Head of the delousing sanitation department."*



*The partisan leader Chaim Yellin.*



*Avraham Golub (Tory) and Pnina Sheinzon after their return from taking Pnina Sheinzon's young daughter, Shulamit, to a hiding place outside the Ghetto.*



*The Jewish Council's boy runners, who delivered the Council's messages throughout the Ghetto. They also warned the various clandestine groups when the Germans were coming, and warned those who were trying to smuggle food into the Ghetto when a guard was near. At bottom right is Avraham Tory's personal friend Yankele Bergman. For three years he risked his safety by carrying Tory's diary entries, documents, and other materials from the Council offices to their hiding place.*



*Lucia Elstein (later Lavon), who was Tory's assistant at the Jewish Council and who succeeded Tory as Council secretary, with Advocate Shimberg, the assistant secretary, and the Council runner Yankele Bergman.*



**'We have here a record of what it is like to live through seasons in Hell... Remarkable and unforgettable, I cannot commend this book too highly to anyone who seeks to understand these terrible times. Allan Massie, *Sunday Telegraph***

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