

Life of Jewish Partisans and Jewish Family Camps in the Forest, From a Diary by a Jewish Partisan, 1942-1943

August 12, 1942

...The idea of the forest returned and came to life. After the second mass-murder, all of us were certain that the Germans made no difference between one Jew and another... They deceived the Judenrat and the Jewish Police when they promised them that they would stay alive if they helped to carry out the slaughter, and in the end they killed them too. Once more we began to search for ways of escape outside the ghetto....

The first to escape were Jews from the neighborhood to Naliboki Forest. They disappeared and nothing more was heard of them. The people from Zhetl also went, to Lipiczanka Forest, and they were joined by some from Nowogrodek, who returned after a while to take with them their relatives and friends. From them we heard details of life in the forest. They have arms, they carry out attacks on Germans traveling on the roads; the peasants are afraid of them and supply them with food. There are Russian partisans in the forest who live on good terms with the Jews and carry out joint attacks on the Germans with them.

Young boys of 15 to 17 snatch arms from the Germans and fix stocks to pistols and rifles. A small group got together and moved out to the Belskis. Two of them came back to the ghetto. They would have nothing to do with anyone there, and refused to speak to their former friends weren't they partisans? They went back to the forest and took with them their relatives, wives and acquaintances.

[1943]

As a result of our many attacks on the Germans in the area of our camp, a German assault was to be expected any day. Information reached us that the Germans knew where we were. The Staff decided to dissolve the separate groups and to reestablish the Brigade.

At the beginning of April all the groups were ordered to leave their valleys and move within 24 hours to Brozova Forest in Stara-Huta.

We packed our belongings, filled our knapsacks, and fastened our blankets on top of them. The cooking gear and other things were loaded on carts and we moved out. The night was cloudy and the sky full of rain. The damp penetrated into the very marrow of our bones. The dry, bare branches of the young trees waved and bent hither and thither. Our thoughts were black too. Many of us had been lost in our wanderings from forest to forest, from base camp to base camp. They had fallen, and who knew what awaited us at the next base?

By day the snow began to melt. Long pools of water stretched along the sandy paths. We had many kilometers to go. Our feet sink in the mud as though it were soft dough. You want to rest and there is no place to sit. Everything is wet and damp. Now we have found a kind of hillock from which the water has run off. The people sit down, rest, eat their fill and then continue on their way. In this way we crossed forests, fields, and roads until we reached Brozova Forest, in Stara-Huta.

There we found groups that had arrived before us - the group of Yudel Belski, who had lost 10 of his best men; he had few fighting men and their arms were poor: the group could no longer survive on its own. Also the Dworecki group, which had arrived early at the new base. The cold was not yet over and they had built huts for themselves.

After a brief consultation we decided not to build huts. We found a dry hill, stretched out on our knapsacks, rested and set about putting up a shelter of branches.

In the course of a few days all the groups gathered in one place. We began to live according to the plan that had applied before the winter. Every evening the whole unit assembled. One platoon was selected for guard duty for the next 24 hours; several groups were sent out to get food; the people were divided up according to kitchens, each group doing its own cooking. The groups received their supplies from a central store, in accordance with the number of its members.

At the beginning of April a group of Jews and their families were sent to us from the *Iskra* (spark) group. Their arms were taken from them and they were

told to join the Jewish company. These were the first Jewish refugees from Lida Ghetto. The young and single people stayed with the Russians....

Source: *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document no. 210