



The Holocaust

ETERNAL ECHOES

Teach and Learn About the Holocaust

The Holocaust

Liquidation of Ghettos

Apparently, there was no clear order to kill all Jews in *Reichskommissariat Ukraine* (RKU), but on the 29th and 30th of August 1942, the commander of the security police, Pütz, said that the “resettlement of the Jews” was a problem that needed to be solved “to one hundred percent”. This meant that the ghettos were supposed to be liquidated within six weeks. Exceptions should only be made for Jews who worked in the armaments industry. However, when this order was given, the Jews of Dąbrowica and the nearby town Sarny had already been killed.



View of the commerce street Ul. Handlowa in Sarny. The street later became part of the ghetto.

On the 23rd of August, the day before the deportations from Dąbrowica began; an incident with tragic consequences took place in Sarny. A resistance group planned to set the ghetto on fire so that the inhabitants could escape. Szmeryahu Gershonok, the head of the Jewish Council, knew about the plan and had approved it. But his secretary Herrmann Neumann said that the Nazis had promised him that the Jews would not be harmed. The rebels did not want to risk an uprising and get people killed if there was a reasonable chance that nothing would happen. So the rebellion was cancelled and the next day the deportations started.



The entrance of a ghetto in Ukraine.

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Transport to Sarny

From the 24th of August, around 14,000 Jews and 100 Roma from the surrounding area, including Dąbrowica, were concentrated to Sarny. When the Jews from Dąbrowica were marched to the railway station, around 1,500 people manage to flee. Even though the Ukrainian guards had been bribed to look the other way they started shooting and about 200 Jews were killed. Some of those who succeeded to flee were later captured, but more than 500 managed to escape to the forest. Several hundred of them reached the nearby ghetto of Wysock, but a couple of weeks later they were killed together with the local Jews.

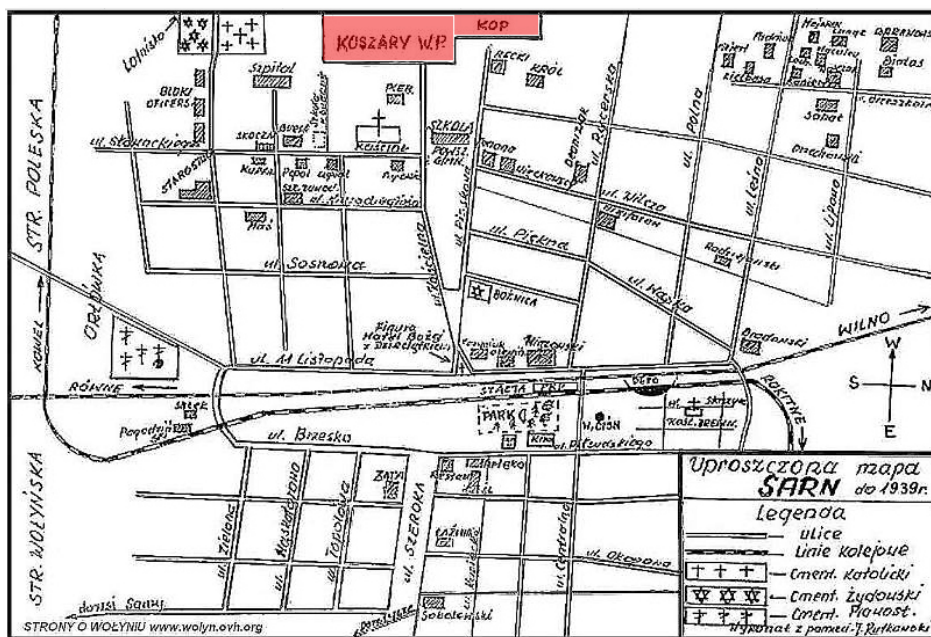


Jews in Brody, Ukraine, detained and awaiting deportation.

The 3,000 Jews that were transported from Dąbrowica to Sarny were not brought to the ghetto. Instead they were put in wooden barracks, located within a separate barbed wire fence. This provisional camp was situated next to the Catholic cemetery and the hospital. For the first 24 hours, the deportees did not get any food, not even water to drink. People had to exchange their belongings for a little water, and carry it in their shoes and caps.

The Massacre

On the 27th of August, the Jews from the Sarny ghetto were escorted to the provisional camp. On the same day, the liquidation of the Jews from the Sarny and Dąbrowica region started. The Jews had to gather in the square next to the Jewish bathhouse.



Together with local helpers, the Germans took the Jews from Rokitno and brought them to a nearby forest. Shortly afterwards, the sound of gunfire reached the town, so the remaining Jews realized what would be their fate. In order to escape, several Jews cut the fence and the Roma set their barracks on fire. 500–1,000 managed to escape. 2,500 were shot on the spot and the rest were brought to the forest and shot there, all in all about 13,000.

The Germans ordered the farmers from Sarny and bordering villages to come with their horses and carts, and transport the bodies of the Jews that had been

Hand-drawn city map until 1939 with Jewish, Catholic and Orthodox cemeteries.

murdered in the camp to the mass graves in the forest. Afterwards, the Germans and parts of the local Polish and Ukrainian population started to hunt those Jews who had escaped. Anti-semitism was on the rise and people suffered from the hardship of the war. As a result the Germans, who often offered rewards, found people that were willing to collaborate and support their cause.



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Shelter in the Forest

Jews who managed to escape often hid in the forest. But since they did not have enough food they needed to find non-Jewish people to help them, or join a partisan group. However, not all partisan groups welcomed Jews. They needed men and women with fighting experience. People not fit to fight and children were a burden to the group. Some Ukrainians were also hostile to Jews and did not want them in their groups.



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There were also Jews who created their own partisan groups. The most famous was that of the Bielski brothers. They

Bielski partisans.

set up a family camp in the Naliboki forest north of Dąbrowica and Sarny, where more than 1,000 people – of which the majority were non-combatants – survived. The story of these men, women and children is told in the Hollywood production "Defiance" (2008). Jewish partisans did not only have to fight the Germans, but also to protect themselves from Ukrainian nationalist rebels, who killed many Jews.

About 50 Jews from Dąbrowica survived in Soviet exile, partisan units or other hideouts until the town was liberated with the aid of Soviet partisans on January 10, 1944. From Sarny, about 100 Jews, 2% of the pre-war Jewish population, survived.

After its liberation the town was bombed during German air raids which destroyed much of what was left. In 1946, the majority of the remaining Jews of the Sarny and Dąbrowica regions left for Poland.

In Memory of the Victims

After the war the communist regime did not establish many memorials. However, local communities and even Jews returning to their hometowns were successful in creating memorials. In many villages and small towns monuments were raised for family members and neighbours, usually simple obelisks and plaques with the names of the local victims. From this time is the first memorial of Sarny's and Dąbrowica's Jews. It was initiated by Holocaust survivors who wanted to mark the mass graves with a stone. The memorial was inaugurated during a ceremony organized by Jewish survivors in 1946.



A group of survivors in Sarny, 1945.

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In late 1947, Stalin took full control over the debate of the representation of the war. Despite of the massive human and material losses of the Soviet Union during WWII, he turned it into an image of heroism and communist victory. From that time on it was hardly possible to discuss the Holocaust, and local commemoration of Jewish victims was difficult. The political thaw after Stalin's death in 1953 did not affect the commemoration of the Holocaust. It remained a silenced topic until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991.

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