

After the Pogrom

by Tova Perlshtein

Tova Perlshtein was born in Kupel, Ukraine in 1912 to Frieda and Baruch Rudman. She escaped the Holocaust because she was sentenced to 20 years labor in Siberia for the crime of being a Zionist. She went off to labor camp with her twin infants who died there. She has lived in Israel since 1958, where, according to Eliav Bar-Hai, "She has spent her life divided between the laborious task of documenting the extermination of Kupel and the underground Zionist movement in Stalinist Russia, and helping new immigrants get settled in Israel." Her unpublished memoirs, *Kupel: In Memory of My Shtetl and the Dear Ones Who Died There*, provides a unique and detailed history of the Podolia region in the decades leading to the Nazi holocaust. The following excerpt is one of the few known accounts of Felshtin's destruction in the holocaust. Tova Perlshtein's memoirs were translated by Eliav Bar-Hai and Ophira Druch. Lawrence J. Korman provided technical assistance in preparing the document for publication.

Shmuel Raber, a native of Felshtin, was fighting in the front, survived, and moved to Proskurov after the war. He stated that the village of Felshtin, District of Kamenetz-Podolsk, is close to Proskurov and suffered the same disasters as the small villages in Ukraine during the Civil War in Russia during the Revolution of 1919.

In 1919, a day after Proskurov pogrom, a message was received in Post Office that Petlura was planning to arrive in Felshtin, and his soldiers were planning to "celebrate". The message was received by a clerk (Zimmerman), an anti-Semitic German who did not forward it to the Police. On the same day 7,000 Jews were murdered without the police involvement. Zimmerman escaped to Kharkov the capitol of Ukraine, but the people of Felshtin found him and killed him.

After the Civil War the Jews had normal life, but the troubles came back after the New Political Economy -- *Novi Ekonomatzki Politika* -- was destroyed. Shmuels' father, Joseph Raber, was a butcher, and, of course, a second class citizen. In order to qualify as a "proletarian," Shmuel went to work in a leather factory in Votovchi, a big village next to the railroad. He became a good worker and within half a year he was declared "a real proletarian." He got promoted to a merchant position and collected leather in entire district.

During the *kolectivatzia* and the famine, Shmuel had a lot of work because the herds died of starvation, and the farmers sold its skin to the government. During the New Political Economy's destruction, Joseph Raber the butcher paid the taxes and was allowed to stay in his house. Joseph had a cow, goat and a calf. According to the Russian values of that time, a butcher was a rich man and the government took away his cow, goat and calf, as well as his money.

In Felshtin (as in all the villages of the Ukraine), the Zionist movement became stronger. Shmuel's brother was a member of the "Chalutz." The older guys met in a darkened room. In 1937, fifteen Zionist youth were arrested and were sent to Proskurov. After a few months in prison, they were murdered. In 1938 only one woman, a 19-year-old cousin of Raber, came back. She never told anyone what happened in the prison, and people were afraid to ask. She looked very old and devastated.

After the War while living in Proskurov, Raber related that in 1943 the council decided to build a supermarket in the old building of the KGB in 1943. They found remains of bones in the basement. Hundreds of people assembled there, requesting to bury the bones, but the KGB refused. The people started shouting and crying, but the police used its force to disperse the people. At night the bones were taken to an unknown place.

During the Nazis invasion, the Jews who did not leave Felshtin hoped to meet Germans as in the '20s during the Revolution. On the day of the invasion, Seyuma, a distinguished older man, came forward to welcome them with bread and salt, but the German officer shot him and killed him immediately. The officer, irritated by the fact that a Jew dared to approach his soldiers, ordered the shooting of fifteen more people.

On Yom Kippur in 1941, all the Jews in Felshtin were led to a forest 15 km away near the village of Pavlovich and were forced to dig a big grave where they were buried alive. After the War, the surviving Jews erected a memorial tombstone above that grave. Raber, who fought the Nazis in the front and survived the war, visited this grave and took a picture of it. Later, the local residents broke the tombstone. Today, there is nothing left of this reminder. They also destroyed the houses of the Jews, so the Jews would not have a place to return to. Most of the villages in Ukraine do not have a Jewish population.