

Memorial to Pogrom Victims of Sokolifka

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Recently, Holocaust survivors met in Israel and commemorated the victims of that horror.

I asked Rabbi Norden for permission to commemorate and observe yarzeit of the victims of the pogroms which I experienced.

Exactly 62 years ago today, the 8th of Av is the yarzeit of the first pogrom in the shtetl Sokolifka from which I came. Similar pogroms happened in hundreds of shtetls in the Ukraine where one half million Jews perished.

The Russian Revolution started in 1917 continued thru 1918 and 1919. Various military forces fought against each other for control of the country. In between they attacked the Jewish shtetls and wrecked havoc on the Jews. There was no government, no police, no post office, worthless paper money.

Our shtetl acquired some rifles and organized a night watch which protected us so we did not have casualties. The Goyim tried several times to take away our arms but did not succeed. Every Shabbat in the shul, announcements were made of the pogroms in surrounding communities, and with the reciting of the Av Harachamim the cries from the men's and women's sections over sixty years ago, still ring in my ears.

In our shtetl we had a Hassidic Rabbi. When the pogroms started, his disciples cried to him to do something. He said "As long as I live there will be no casualties in our shtetl Sokolifka." The Jews and the goyim talked about this and believed the rabbi until seven days into the month of Av, 1919.

On that Shabbat afternoon, the Ukraine National Army with all artillery moved into our shtetl. A soldier on a horse ran to the Rabbi's home and hurried up the stairs. The Rabbi with his disciples had finished the third meal. The soldier asked "Who is the Rabbi?" The Hassidim did not reply. The Rabbi answered "I am the Rabbi." The soldier put a bullet into the Rabbi's heart and killed him instantly.

The next day the 8th day of Av, the army assembled all men ages 15-55 in the synagogue, and demanded a million ruble contribution. In the afternoon when the collection was only up to one half, they took all the men- 155 of them—took them out of town and shot them under the shouts of Shma Israel and killed them.

We later surmised that some of our neighbors conspired to make it easier for themselves to pogrom us, asked the army to kill the Rabbi and the young men who protected the shtetl. After that there was robbery and thievery all the time.

In December the same year, the Russian army under General Danekens command, retreating from the Bolsheviks passed our shtetl—the temperature was 20 below zero. They made sport by stripping many Jews naked and chased them out on the ice where many froze to death. After this, we all ran away to the nearest city Uman.

Yet some Jews remained in my shtetl. When the Nazis arrived in the 1940's, they assembled the remaining Jews, made them dig their own graves, threw in the children alive and shot the older people. Known killed in Sokolifka were 248. Their names are listed on

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memorial tablets in front of Jewish cemeteries in three cities: Buffalo, New York and Philadelphia. How many more the Nazis killed is not known.

I have quoted these statements from a book on the complete history of Sokolifka. This book is in the archives of Yad Vashem.

I am indebted to our own Temple Israel member, Mr. Jerome Lefkowitz for translating the book from Hebrew to English.

I want to explain and not leave a wrong impression of the general population in the Ukraine at that time. Millions of Jews lived there. One half million were victims of the pogroms. There were the conspirators who plotted the pogroms. Most Jews survived because of help from good neighbors.

In my family, we were 10. Two were wounded - - my brother-in-law, and myself. He died later from the wounds. We and most other Jews survived because our Christian neighbors helped us.