

Trouble and Tribulations

A War Diary by M. Rotholtz

Here follow the personal diary entries, originally written by Meir Rotholtz (10/09/1915-10/04/2007). His biographical account has been translated into English in 2020 in a separate photographic document which provides the circumstances (early life, holocaust testimony, and post-diary) to period covered in the diary.

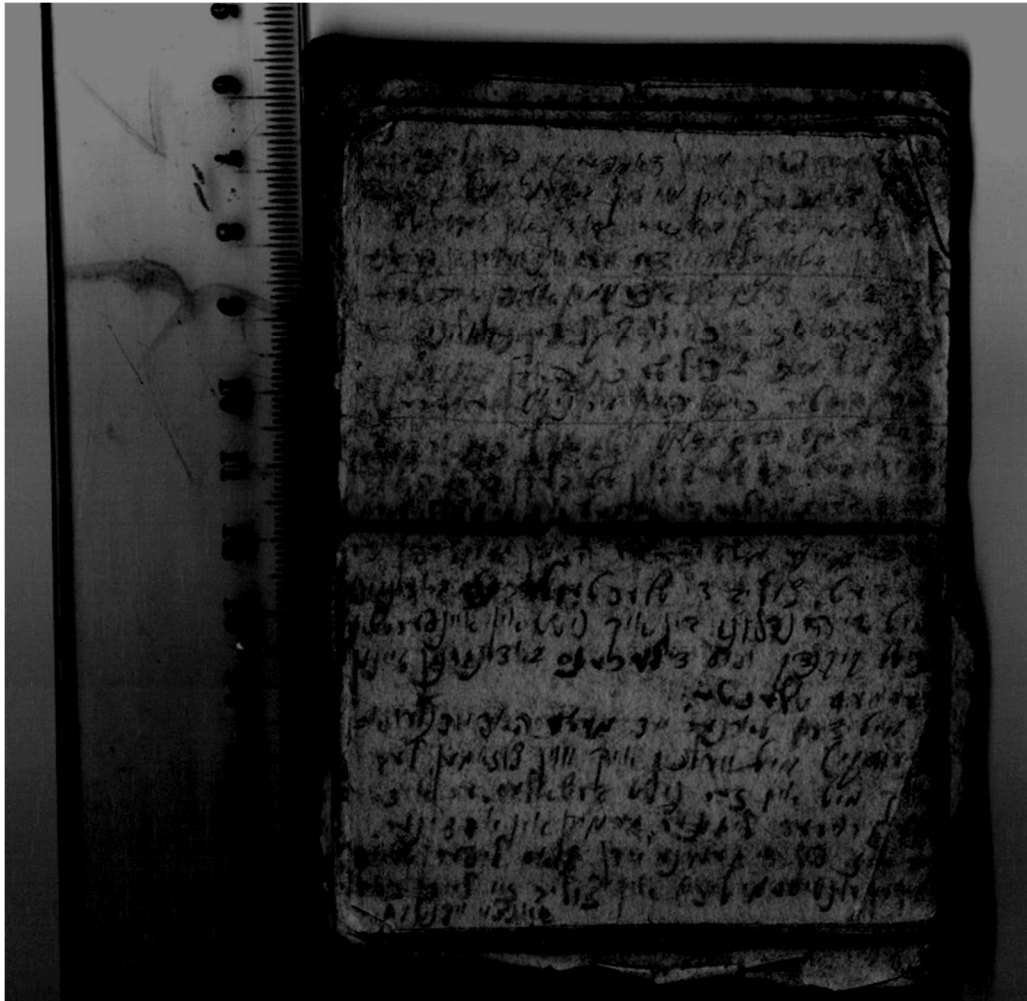
He first wrote the diary in Yiddish, later he translated it into Hebrew, retyped in 2019 by his daughter Michaela, now in 2020 edited into English by A (temporarily withheld), Meir's grandson.

The diary is a personal documentation of events in Europe 1945-1946 when he was about 29 years old. It boasts some gripping historical accounts as well as personal reflections. Regrettably some of the nuances have been lost in the processes of having been translated twice over and re-written four times since his own first-hand, mother's tongue version.

The original is a miniature (hardly 8cm long) booklet, starting in Polish and continued in Yiddish. Michaela says he moved to Yiddish as he realised the magnitude of antisemitic sentiments. He assumed that in the case the diary was to be found, a Polish reader would be more likely to discard the booklet whilst a Yiddish reader is more likely to appreciate the value of the testimony.

The original diary is currently held by Michaela.





*It is entirely possible that some inconsistencies might have crept into the text in the rework processing and some of the text may appear disjointed or inconsistent.
Names of people and places are best available phonetic approximation.
Author's comments in [square brackets].
A schematic route map is added at end of the document.*

05/01/1945

Us soviet soldiers have departed from Lublin [city in east Poland] heading for the Wisla [river Vistula 250km west from Lublin]. Then onwards we followed the instruction to only advance at night on the byway and by foot. We would rest during daytimes; always resting under the sky on the snow. Not once were we lucky enough to rest in a house or a barn, but on occasions we were fortunate to be given some straw to pad ourselves down on.

12/01/1945

We crossed the Wisla on a Bailey bridge, under darkness and under German fire. One of us got injured but we managed to cross.

13/01/1945

At sunset the commander had lead us to the front-line where we hunkered down for the night, anticipating the battle.

14/01/1945

At 08:00 we begun to attack. 08:15 tenderising artillery preceded our charge. We leaped out of our diggings [trenches?], my Russian friend Kochminanko and myself with our anti-tank gun joined the others.

I have made it all the way to the forth line inside German territory. At a 2m range I was shot by a German gun 4 times. I played dead and whilst faced into the ground, a German shot me twice in the shoulders (needless to describe my thoughts...).

Lying there for some time, I turned my head around to see the coast was now clear. First creeping on my belly then walking, I made my way out of the digging.

In the house inside the German digging I have found 4 injured Russians, I recline amongst them. Intermittently a Russian sanitar [carer] would give us some words of encouragement. However, we remained lying there for the whole day without medical treatment.

I will forever recall the misery that surrounded us there. Dreading the haemorrhage would sap the last drop of blood out of us. Remaining exhausted, I could not budge for the pains that grounded me in all directions. We couldn't wait to be taken out of there. One of the casualties was helped up to his feet by a fit Russian and was taken away. I thought my heart would cease lying down there.

I managed onto my feet and made my way out of the digging [house?]. Disorientated I have spotted a wounded soldier and approached him. He told me I should tread with care, the whole field was littered in anti-personnel mines. He showed me what the mines look like, I have never seen a mine field before. There was not half a meter between one mine to the next. The soldier walked ahead leaning on his rifle, and I was following. This made for a cautious but very slow progress.

He had a leg injury, my injuries were not in the legs. We said our farewells so I could advance quicker. I walked ahead in the knowledge that any misplaced foot could trigger a mine.

I had been walking in the wrong direction, I doubled-up on myself and walked on [onto a byway]. This byway in the morning was almost deserted [but] had since been littered with mines, then the tanks cleared the mines, then busy traffic (tanks, cars, wagons, and people). I have seen some dead Germans along the 5km walk, and arrived at the infirmary as it was getting dark.

Around me are injured soldiers, some have already succumbed to their wounds. One "butchered" horse. The infirmary that was out in a field was staffed by Red Cross nurses. They would dress the wounds, produce a medical document and load the bandaged soldiers onto a lorry.

I had no leg injuries and my hands were intact, I was not being seen to. I begged the nurse who was very busy to attend to me too. She said she was too busy and that I must get on the lorry, [and that] my medical document should be issued for me at the hospital. I complied.

We arrived at the hospital that night. It was a most impressive building, situated on privately owned land. The building itself was full up. We were instead sent to a marquee outside the building.

There too all the beds are occupied. The rest of us are rolling on the cold wet ground in our muddy uniforms. There were two heaters in the marquee for the cold January night. Both were out of order. One was later repaired, but what good was that?... I have found myself a plank of wood on the ground, on which I could recline. Any sleep was out of the question. My own pains and the groans of the fellow wounded kept us awake all night through.

Whenever a merciful nurse would pass by, cries were heard from all directions. Each is asking for medical attention. The nurse took the names down and promised to return later. Outside the world is all white with snow.

18/01/1945

Having spent 4 days and 4 nights without receiving any medical intervention, I was laid on the operating table, no anaesthesia, they have managed to get one bullet out. The opening was dressed and I was given my dirty uniform shirt to put back on and sent back to bed. I was then transferred 25km away where I heard that Warsaw and Czestochowa [Meir's home-town] have been liberated.

Here I was washed and shaved, my dirty uniform taken away replaced by clean clothes. I was given a medical check, I laid down on a clean bed and started to feel like a new person.

21/01/1945

Another transfer, this time it's 4KM in an ambulance to an empty freight train heading for Lublin. Both mildly and severely injured soldiers loaded up onto a carriage equipped with only a small coal heater and a double bunk.

This is how we were obliged to make the journey, no food, no blanket, only a hard wooden plank.

I feel disgruntled.

22/01/1945

Arrival at the big military hospital of Lublin where, as in other hospitals, we were washed and shaved, and were given clean clothes. At this hospital were wounded soviet soldiers, both Russian and Polish.

I was X-rayed, they have found another bullet in my shoulder.

24/01/1945

Another ambulance ride to the station. A Red Cross train to a yet unknown destination.

Each was given a clean bed, with clean window curtains, nurses running about all over the place in white aprons: I was feeling elated!

We were being carried on to central Russia [thousands of kilometres eastwards, see map].

27/01/1945

Kiev, Ukraine's capital.

It's been 4 days on the tracks and I yearn for something to read. All that could be found are a few books written in Russian, I struggle with reading in Russian.

It was obvious the books were handled by smokers: The typical ripped-off corners of the pages that were being used to role up cigarettes...

29/01/1945

We have gone past Kursk in Russia [west Russia, 500km from Kiev in the Ukraine, 1,100km from Lublin].

30/01/1945

Arrived at Voronezh [250km east from Kursk], deep snow following a heavy snowstorm last night. People are toiling to clear the snow off the tracks, progress is sluggish.

I read a Russian book by Miekowski [unclear spelling].

The atmosphere on board is anti-Semitic, I conceal my background. One Russian soldier says that 'when a Russian cherurgion [surgeon] operates on you it's only half the trouble, even if it is a Jew' [unclear]; that boils my blood.

31/01/1945

We pass Michurinsk [150km north east from Voronezh].

02/02/1945

Tambov [70km west of Voronezh] and one of the casualties is leaving us. He got off the train, his brother who is from Tambov came to fetch him, must be an important person.

04/02/1945

Rtischevo [halfway from Tambov to Saratov]. We must be on our way to Saratov [a south-west Russian city on the Volga river], 160km to go.

05/02/1945

At long last arrived at Saratov. It's been 13 days on the rails, now another day inside the carriage, we are not released and we are to spend another night onboard, stationary.

06/02/1945

We were given our uniforms. Released from the train, we were driven by civilian buses to the hospital at Saratov city centre.

07/02/1945

Away from the battlefields, a proper regular hospital at last. I am being measured to my length and breath, left arm range of movement investigated.

Over the last 2 days I feel ill, I have a headache and high temperature.

08/02/1945

Feeling better today. I have sent a letter to Miszotowic, the Pole who sheltered me in Lithuania post-liberation [refer to biographical account].

Every evening after dinner we get to listen to a concert or watch a film. Tonight played the Chpiev [unclear spelling] film.

11/02/1945

They have taken another X-ray of me yesterday, they have found another bullet in my right shoulder.

14/02/1945

Today is a month since my injury.

I get a daily injection.

I don't know whether I am suitable for an operation. The doctor said they would need to cut through the ribs to get at the bullet and that I could live with this.

16/02/1945

Surgery to my back has successfully removed a bullet, but I have lost a lot of blood.

Knowing that the second bullet is now out is making me stronger.

20/02/1945

Nothing special to report. Concerts at the hospital take place daily, today I could not go as I was unwell.

23/02/1945

I have been moved to the third division of recoveries [hospital ward?], alas I am bewildered why: the others here are almost healthy shouting and jumping whilst I am sweating in bed with a sore head.

Today is the 27th anniversary for the Red Army. Pastry chefs arrived at the hospital to prepare special baked foods, served with wine, vodka and various foods. We were given small gifts like tooth brushes, writing paper and more.

24/02/1945

I was moved back to the second division. The move to the third must have been by mistake.

25/02/1945

Today we had guests over twice. One delegation to do with the Red Army bringing more gifts including tobacco, pastries and butter. The other were the workers from a local factory also bearing gifts. More than the gifts, what matters is that both the fore, and the home-fronts are together as one unit.

04/03/1945

About a week since the last entry. Not only there was little to report, but here in the cold room I struggle to get my hands out of the blanket. During the while I was weighed and measured again and had an X-ray taken. I have watched a film and listened to a concert.

05/03/1945

I have posted a letter to Miszotowic.

09/03/1945

My hands are agonising me. Today was the first electro treatment and galvanisation.

13/03/1945

I'm feeling better today, but not by much. The bullet in the chest won't let me rest.

16/03/1945

Another operation. This one was to clean the infection brought on by the operation two months ago. I used to get severe pains.

17/03/1945

Following the operation I feel not too bad, normal temperature.

31/03/1945

I was moved to another room in the ward three days ago and I'm feeling not too bad.
Political news: The Red Army is at the gates of Berlin. The American and English [British] have completed the encirclement of the Ruhr Pocket [the battle?]. Doubts are beginning to emerge regarding the Treaty of Non-Aggression towards Japan.

14/04/1945

It's been 3 months since my injury and my wound should heal in a few days. I am to stand in front of a medical committee.
Political news: The Red army had taken over Vienna. The Western Allies are making vast progress. President Roosevelt died yesterday.

25/04/1945

The San Francisco Conference for International Peace and Security opened today, as the radio is reporting that Berlin is now completely encircled.

26/04/1945

I have been transferred to the third division.

27/04/1945

The Russian, American and British armies have converged in Berlin. Russian and American soldiers were hugging and kissing.

28/04/1945

It had been decided that I should go to carry out work in the fields belonging to the Saratov hospital. Saratov is on the [mighty] Volga and the fields are 40km to the south.

29/04/1945

We are on our way to a village (dorff), my first time on a ferry.

30/04/1945

I was allocated to be doing a harrow [a type of a plough] and digger operations. To me, conditions here seem impossibly poor. What could be worse than having spent 3 months in hospital operation I am now to sleep out in the open field where the intense cold freezes the water in the bucket? Under such conditions I am not staying.

01/05/1945

Whilst workers worldwide (Russia included) are celebrating the First of May Labourer's Day – I was made to go out to work - and in Russia itself! In fascist Poland not even once had I been made to work on the First of May, yet here, the birthplace of the October Revolution and socialism – I am made to work.

Along with my friend and colleague Ston from White Russia [Belarus, possibly from a nearby town called Valozhyn near Minsk] have been allocated accommodation in the close-by village.

[?]/05/1945

The second day of the holiday and we are not at work. I have never enjoyed Easter [Passover] as I have this year. I have an opportunity to rest, it is back to work tomorrow.

09/05/1945

Hurrah! Hurrah! The war is over! Announced over the radio, all kolkhozes and factories are taking a day off, victory celebrations are taking place.

Only us battle wounded, are not released from work on the big day. We were denied the festivities as the despicable kolkhoz chairman informed us of the news too late that day.

11/05/1945

We are not going out to work today due to foul weather: rain and snow.

I am exceedingly bored. I wish to know what is happening in the world, I want to read.

In this village I can not find a single radio, not even a newspaper. I have asked people if they have any books for me to read, but no luck. I never imagined this could happen in a Russian village.

19/05/1945

Work had become lighter. We are often staying in the house due to rain.

I share a room with my friend Mitteton [spelling?] who is a quiet and pleasant individual.

We stay in a house owned by the husband his wife, they have a daughter named Luba who has a little girl she calls Lola. During those off days I just stay in with nothing to do. I avoid the villagers as I don't fully master the Russian language.

25/05/1945

A Sunday. Off work and the weather is kind. I'm left on my own, and took myself on a local wander. This is a gorgeous May day, the pleasant weather has a good effect on me, I am happy.

27/05/1945

The house owner told us a new accommodation had been found for us. Mitteton suspects we were being sent away because of our indifferent attitude towards the cohabitants. The fact was that work had been accomplished anyway.

31/05/1945

We have been working in the fields for a month. Most of those who came with me from the hospitals have by now been ordered to leave. Only the three of us are staying, it is a real shame my friend Fillip Taton is leaving. I have left Slovenka and moved to Koldestan [spelling?].

01/06/1945

A new group of 23 arrived from the hospital. The Russian leader naczelnik [in Polish/Russian] had been replaced.

02/06/1945

I have settled down at Koldestan along with the new group and the new naczelnik. He also happens to be our coachman. Sure enough he is illiterate, he himself was not interested in the role but was eventually coaxed into it.

06/06/1945

I have found a book by Lermontov in Russian to read, oh how I yearn for a book in Yiddish.

10/06/1945

We are leaving Koldestan and moving into Kroches. Matters not where I am working, let it be at Korches, will be merrier.

11/06/1945

Sunday, off work. It is a hotter day. I laid down underneath a large tree at the banks of the Volga. In the distance I can hear the playing on gormushka [A Garmon is a Russian type of accordion] and laughter.

13/06/1945

I have been sharing with my friend for a few days now in Kroches. The dwelling itself is very comfortable but the mean landlady makes us sleep at the ingress. Cooking is also a problem as the landlord will not cook for us, we receive dried food and must cook it ourselves.

15/06/1945

A group of 15 children of hospital workers from Saratov have arrived here for their summer camp. They stay the night at the local school which is out for summer now. I am amongst the group assisting them to settle down.

16/06/1945

I have a new job: Night-watch over the children. None of my friends wanted this job as it begins at 21:00 whilst they want their free evenings. Conversely, I had nothing to do in the evenings. What is more, I will have all afternoons to read. Here at Kroches I get Russian books, my reading in Russian is good now.

18/06/1945

The children's tutor asked me to drive her to Sanist [spelling of a nearby place?] as a coachman. I had to forgo my afternoon rest and get the help from the naczelnik as I did not know how to harness the horse to the cart.

24/06/1945

The hospital naczelnik arrived to carry out medical tests on the soldiers.

25/06/1945

We all passed the medical tests commissioned by the medical committee [unclear names] from the Russian War Office.

No more children night watch, I'm back working in the fields.

01/07/1945

Sunday, a few guys and myself will be sent back to Saratov hospital to stand in front of a medical committee.

02/07/1945

On a ferry again, sent back to hospital following two months as a "farmer".

03/05/1945

I'm taking a rest at the hospital, back to the newspapers and films which I had not seen for two months.

04/07/1945

A year had passed since the tragedy at Linkeitch [an unmapped location in Lithuania where a work camp was turning into something even more sinister, see Meir's biography].

05/07/1945

Today I have been assessed by the medical committee, I don't know the precise outcome, but I guess I no longer qualify for offensive combat.
I have received an unexpected letter from Miszotowic.

06/07/1945

My nomad life is taking yet another turn. The grubby life of military chaos is to recommence. Tomorrow awaits me yet another medical committee. How I wish to stick with the current organised way of living.
The hospital had decided that I am no longer fit to serve as a fighter and indeed they have supplied me with the appropriate documents.

07/07/1945

I sleep under the sky on a concrete floor. The three wooden bunks are infested with flees, if I am to get any sleep - I opt for the hard floor.
Foodwise I receive one morning and one noon meal, for dinner I get a cinema film.

08/07/1945

Newspapers report of a mutual repatriation agreement between Russia and Poland. I intend to return to Poland and quit my military life.
First I must find out the fate of my family back in Poland. Then I will see what to do next.

09/07/1945

Today was the solar eclipse. I observed it through soot on glass, almost the entire sun was obscured and daylight became darkness.

11/07/1945

Today I have met a political officer to submit a request to go back to Poland, he told me to come back tomorrow.

13/07/1945

It seems going back to Poland will not be easy. Along with me returning home are a youngster from Torno [Tornow is a south-eastern Polish city], and a Polish Jew.

15/07/1945

300 soldiers are being called up to work in the far east [of Russia?] from where we are, us three Poles are on the list.

16/07/1945

An intervention of the Polish Patriotic Council have had us struck off the list.

18/07/1945

The 300 soldiers were taken on the train to the far east. To our great relief we stayed put.

19/07/1945

The train cars are still at the station, there was an attempt to get us on it, nevertheless we go nowhere.

20/07/1945

Us three Poles are sent out by boat on the Volga to work 200km away from Saratov.

25/07/1945

On a ferry [up the Volga] to Khvalynks I have met a Polish Jewish guy named Godin and Polish Jewish family from Stanislawow (Galicia Poland). The journey was a cheerful one.

26/07/1945

Arriving at the work place 5km from Khvalynks, my friend and I were allocated a flat.

27/07/1945

First day at work, we are piling up logs not far from the banks of the Volga. The work is not arduous.

28/07/1945

The food at work is quite poor and we decided to suspend work. However, I refuse to join the work strike.

I do not get on well with the Levinewsky the Jew from Torno. He is a big liar, a dishonest person. He is one of those odious Jews who give legitimacy to anti-Semites, all Jews suffer because of those.

31/07/1945

We have not been working for a few days, no one seems to take interest in us.

An officer at a lieutenant rank summoned us to tell us that we will be sent back to Saratov because we are not working.

01/08/1945

We return to a village called Antopka [?].

03/08/1945

In a group of 9 people we crossed the Volga from Saratov to Engels. That city was the capital of the pre-war German region, the aim was to secure military targets.

We were coned, we are being sent to work.

04/08/1945

Rain stops work

05/08/1945

Sunday, a day off. We have contacted the Polish Patriotic Council at Angels. Here too we are being sent to watch a film.

06/08/1945

In accordance to the medical committee, I was positioned as a guard over the various sites. I think I can be satisfied with that.

07/08/1945

Today was the first day at the new job, we guard military camps.

08/08/1945

On my guard again. A rumour was spread by a soldier, saying that Russia has given an ultimatum to Japan.

09/08/1945

The Russian-Japanese conflict is now a fact. The Red Army has broken through the Japanese front and is making advances. The Russians have crossed the mighty Amur river [Russia-China border].

10/08/1945

It is said that Japan had surrendered.
I have sent a letter to Myszotowic.

11/08/1945

It seems the Japanese surrender is partially true. Japan complies with allies demands but the demands are a tall order on the Caesar [emperor]. The allies demand total surrender.

12/08/1945

War goes on.

15/08/1945

We have found out that Japan had finally surrendered unconditionally and that this had taken place yesterday.

18/08/1945

I have been unwell for a few days now. I have visited the doctor who said that I have hepatitis and I am to be hospitalized tomorrow.

19/08/1945

I'm in hospital.

26/08/1945

I am feeling much better now and not bored, there is time a plenty to read books. In the evenings I can walk about the streets. I have even found a Yiddish newspaper at the Polish Patriotic Council. The newspaper says that there are Jews in Czestochowa now.

01/09/1945

It is a short walking distance to the Polish Patriotic organization, I go there each and every day. There I find newspapers in Yiddish and Polish.
Today is 6 years since the outbreak of war.

03/09/1945

With regards to the Japanese surrender, a "Day of Victory" was announced at the Organization.

04/09/1945

I have left hospital and gone back to my patch in the army.
Bad news from Poland tell of anti-Semitic protests.

06/09/1945

Together with my Polish friend Ransen, we addressed the military command in writing, stating that we are Polish subjects and we demand our right to return to Poland.

08/09/1945

In relation to our request, we were sent back to Saratov.

09/09/1945

Arrived at Saratov yesterday evening. Today is Sunday: a wash day. Tomorrow I am to face a medical committee.

10/09/1945

The committee officer sent me to face the committee of the Division. They decided that I am not medically fit to carry weapons.
Today is my 30th birthday.

11/09/1945

100 of us who are unfit to carry weapons are being sent to work. Where? Nobody knows.

12/09/1945

50km by train from Saratov we arrive at Leiszvitinia [?] where we are set to work on a local sovkhos [Soviet farm]. I do night shifts sorting out grain.

17/09/1945

We are transferred to another brigade within the sovkhos. The conditions here are worse. We have met a group of girls, judging by appearance only they are probably city girls.

18/09/1945

Rain stops work.

19/09/1945

Another day off work thanks only to the rain.

22/09/1945

I got up early today and seen the green shoots of the grass rise above the frost. We were promised that this work will discontinue on the 01/10/1945

23/09/1945

A telegram arrived at the sovkhos, telling us to go to Saratov on the 25/09/1945.

25/09/1945

We were supposed to be in Saratov today but the sovkhos have managed to postpone our departure.

The younger of the group make a daily 2km walk to the girls that arrived here from Saratov. The older lads too have been going there, showing off to the girls their courting skills superior to those of the youngsters. I take no part in all this.

26/09/1945

The 01/10/1945 extension was agreed.

27/09/1945

We are desperate for a newspaper. It's been so long since I have last read a newspaper, living in isolation from the world. Sometimes we receive surplus "culture", other times not even at medicinal dosage...

29/09/1945

Finally the move to Saratov looks certain now. At long last I can wash and change my underwear (unchanged for 4 weeks).

I have read a news article about the disbanding of soldiers in Russia.

Sounds like the end of my tragic wanderings (is this really the end?). Various thoughts go through my head about going back to Poland, what I have gone through and the near future.

01/10/1945

We are being divided into 5 groups, lists and uniforms are being handed out. In a word: mayhem! Apart from the year of enlistment criterion those who were born up to 1925, those who are not carrying weapons are also being released. My Polish friend Rans who was born in 1927 was not fortunate enough to be released. The reason for my release is to do with obvious circumstances.

02/10/1945

In a Nowy Widnokrag [Polish?] (New Horizons) article, I have read about the rebellion in the Bialystok ghetto [Poland]. I realised that the rebellion deputy head was Mordekhai Tenenbaum, a good acquaintance of mine, an active member in the Frieheit Partei (Freedom Party) whom I knew way back in Vilna. [Meir's biography describes how a few years earlier he was smuggled into Vilna in Lithuania from his Poland home as a refugee, on his way to Bialystok. Vilna was an active centre of displaced people of various political affinities. They were persecuted by both Germans and Lithuanians.]

03/10/1945

A Wola Polska (Free Poland) newspaper article dating 10/09/1945 reported of the Polish Patriotic organization in Russia address to the Polish national union government. In it there was criticism over the recent anti-Semitic pogroms following the liberation of Poland.

In the article was mentioned the name of one Menakhem Brum, who I was almost certain is from my home-town. I wanted to write to him but I could find no address for him, and in fact, I myself had no address.

I have met a Jewish refugee claiming that the current wisdom is not to travel to Poland now for the danger of pogroms.

I am wondering and pondering over that very same quandary. Nevertheless, I have decided to make my way to Poland, as there is no way into the future without knowing what had become of my family.

09/10/1945

Saratov is in pandemonium and chaos. Tomorrow morning we are to leave to Latishvo [?] and from there direct to a certain place. Should I be happy? Could I be happy?

11/10/1945

I was going to leave yesterday, alas I haven't. I am on my way today for sure.

Documents to-hand, I have a choice of route to take. I have always wanted to see Moskwa [Moscow] and if not now then it will be never. Before I leave Russia I ought to ascertain the fate of my brother Michael who now lived in Mariopol, Ukraine [sent to work there mining coal]. If I don't do that I will never be able to forgive myself, I might just manage to find out something about him. I can not recall the precise address for Michael but I believe it will come to me. Off I go.

I'm on the Saratov-Moskwa train, change in Mitchurinsky [? 500km north-west from Saratov], for the Rostov [? Russia's south-west border, 800km south from Mitchurinsky] train.

Quite some accomplishment these days to travel by train. The trains are packed with released soldiers, ticket offices are hard to reach, massive crowding at both entrances and exits.

12/10/1945

Noon I arrive at Mitchurinsky station. The snow covering is thin, but not melting away very quickly.

On the way here I have befriended two soldier friends: a Russian and a Jew, they too are heading for Rostov. So we travel in company. We leave Mitchurinsky this evening on the Moskwa-Rostov train.

13/10/1945

24 hours elapsed since Mitchurinsky, we still have the whole night before Rostov.

We have passed Voronezh, Millerovo and Chersak [Novocherkassk? Heading south].

14/10/1945

I arrive at Rostov before morning. The station is heaving with soldiers and civilians.

I am not far from where Michael was living [Mariopol is 180km west in Ukraine]. Might I spot him in the crowds? My gaze intensified, heart beating fast. Do I look for him amongst the soldiers or the civilians?

My train is scheduled for 17:30, I join the long queue for the office to validate my ticket. I'm told tickets are only valid with a pass from a medical committee and I better complete procedures soon. I'm told a train departing from another platform is going to my next station, Ilanovskaya [?] and that procedures can be completed onboard. Running for it, I manage to board the train as it departs. On board I'm told this is not the Ilanovskaya train and that this train is bound for a different direction, I don't know what to do. Eventually it turned out to be the correct Ilanovskaya train where I am arriving tonight

15/10/1945

Having left Ilanovskaya last night, I am now arriving at Synovty [?], to change for Onbakh [?] where I get the direct train to Mariopol.

Having arrived at Mariopol in the evening, I have checked myself into a soup kitchen where food and accommodation were given free as I was in my uniform.

16/10/1945

There are days in the life of an individual that stay with him for the lifetime, be it for joy or for sorrow. This is a day of profound anguish for me. The very last hope of seeing my brother Michael had finally expired. Today I have found out that my only and beloved brother had fallen victim in the hands of the Nazi assassins mid October 1941.

[further details in the biography] I have left Mariopol that day, taking the train to Stalino [Donesk in Ukraine] where I changed for the Kyiv train.

17/10/1945

I am on the Kyiv train [heading north west].

18/10/1945

I have arrived at Kyiv in the morning where my ticket was refused for the Lviv (Lemberg) route, they insisted I should go via Kovel [north east Ukraine]. The Lviv train was packed full, and starting to move, I jumped on it and almost fell off it, the passengers pulled the emergency break handle and the train stopped.

I was expecting trouble so I vanished in the crowd, obviously not making it onto that train.

19/10/1945

Kyiv to Sarny, Sarny to Kovel evening arrival. A few hours later, holding an invalid ticket, I was on my way to Lemberg [unclear text, showing documents to a military officer]. In Lemberg I was hoping to meet someone from Czestochowa for some information about the fate of the Jews back there before I return to Poland.

20/10/1945

Running about in Lemberg, trying in vain to find someone from Czestochowa. I have found Jews desperately wanting to go into Poland.

I am travelling back to Kovel today to sort out my documents.

21/10/1945

Arriving in the morning at Kovel, it transpires that any further documents were unnecessary to enter Poland.

At midnight I arrive in Lubomir [Lyuboml'?] 12km to River Bug which separates Poland from Russia [Ukraine?].

22/10/1945

Leaving Lyuboml' at noon, and having crossed the Bug westwards, I am now in Poland.

23/10/1945

Having arrived at Chlem last night, I have left there before noon and got to back to Lublin [see January 1945 above]. I have spent the rest of the day walking around Lublin searching for my acquaintances from months ago, alas, all in vain. I have left Lublin in the evening and arrived in Kielce [a city in south central Poland] before morning.

24/10/1945

From Keilce I travelled to Bedzin [Bendin in Yiddish, near Katowic], [unclear text of concerning the situation back home in Czestochowa, only 75km north of Bedzin]. Here I have come to realise that what I have already known was indeed true: None of my family [who had not fled] remained amongst the living. Since 4 years ago the Nazis had them removed from Bedzin.

Now in Bedzin there is a kibbutz (Mizrakhi) which is a group of boys and girls returning from various death camps. This is where I was made a guest and stayed the night.

25/10/1945

From a lady here I have found out that Meir Poliwoda [his cousin and his sister Hadasa's husband] is alive in the American zone in Germany. She tells me of a list of all Bedzins' survivors at the Jewish Council. I have walked to the Council to verify the information and found it to be true. M. Poliwoda is at Feldafing camp [33km south west of Munchen?]. My trip to Bedzin was not in vain after all.

After 6 years of nomadic life, the train is taking me to Czestochowa. Arriving in the evening I head for the Council soup kitchen [where he stayed the night]. I lack the courage to go to the house where my parents used to live, I know what is expecting me there.

26/10/1945

Having left my belongings at the soup kitchen and headed for Gariniszarisika [Potters] street [the rented home address] where my parents lived for many years. Still out on the street, I can see the grave and total calamity from a distance through the window. I gather courage to knock at the door. No response, the door is locked. I go back to the street and have a look around. The area where thousands of Jews used to live is one big ruin. The houses are unrecognisable, only brick and rubble.

I walk amongst the destruction of Gariniszarisika street and surrounding streets [other street names mentioned uncertain spelling: Nadzesna, Nostowa, Santorska, Kosa, Spada] where the Jews were concentrated. I get a pain in my chest and return to the soup kitchen.

It is a day full of news, sad news over the friends and acquaintances who were lost, but also good news reuniting with the survivors, although their numbers are dwarfed compared with that of the lost ones.

But the most important piece of news is that my sister Haya [=alive in Hebrew] Dina Hadasa is indeed alive, though I have no idea of her whereabouts. I shall go to Lodz [130km north] tomorrow to hunt for her.

27/10/1945

Soon after my evening arrival at Lodz I have found out Hadasa is in town, but due to the late hour I could not yet make further progress. I also found out that M. Poliwoda [her husband] had already arrived in Israel. I have found many acquaintances from Lithuania in Lodz. I was made warmly welcome at the Frieheit kibbutz in Lodz where I have met acquaintances from the kibbutz at Shabyli [see 1940 in his biography].

28/10/1945

I have met Sarah Felshin [spelling?], it's good news for me after having searched the streets all day without luck.

29/10/1945

At long last I have thrown away the military uniform and put on civilian clothing. No luck finding Hadasa.

30/10/1945

At long last I have found my sister Hadasa, needless to describe the great joy.

02/11/1945

Together with Hadasa we have found Czesla Bida [spelling?] - Hadasa's friend with whom she lived all the while. Czesla is married to Kaszik [spelling?] who had returned from travels. We were introduced, he seemed not too bad a chap.

These days Hadasa and I spend all our time together, recounting what we have gone through during the while away from one another. She had filled me in on our parents' fate.

03/11/1945

Having seen Sarah Fleshin off on the platform on her way to Warsaw, my heart was heavy with guilty feelings towards her.

I have made my mind up to go to Israel via Germany with sister Hadasa, her friend Czesla and husband [Kaszik].

A Party gathering is taking place all day in Lodz, which includes representatives from Czestochowa namely Aharon Geldbrad, Bszeszisnky and myself. The lecture is on tomorrow.

04/11/1945

The lecture given by Dr Bermann who was a Centre member since before the war has been a success.

I'm heading back to Czestochowa to the Party club. Before the great scattering, we (Mordekhai Brhemherzig, Shaye Gelbrad and myself) have hidden the Party flags inside the club walls. The friends (Haharon Geldbrad and Mordekhai Awiezki) whom I have met now in Czestochowa know that the flags are hidden at the club, but I am the only surviving one to know the exact location of the hidden flags. I withdrew the flags from hiding.

During my time in Lithuania I hoped that if I survive to be present at the day of liberation, what a great day that would be for me. Today is that day.

05/11/1945

I have taken the flags ("Youth", "Borokhow Youth Association", "Spot Stern Association" and an extra red flag) out of the hiding place and handed them over to Haharon Geldbrad, a member of the Party Council. For me it had been a most joyful event.

Upon release from the Russian army I received a dismissal letter which I intend to use for my travel to Germany.

06/11/1945

Back in Lodz from Czestochowa [for the last time ever], I have said my goodbyes to all of my friends, as tomorrow with Hadasa, Czesla and husband [Kaszik] we are leaving for Berlin. We have the tickets and we are aboard the Lodz – Poznan train.

07/11/1945

No direct train to Poznan, we changed at Kutno [central Poland], arriving in the small hours. I am on my way to Germany, yet I hold no document to permit such thing. I am somewhat apprehensive.

08/11/1945

Following a fearful night [recounted in the Aftermath section of his Biography] we were relieved and elated to have arrived in Berlin. We stay at a house owned by the Berlin Jewish community, where conditions are not of the worse and all are in a buoyant mood.

09/11/1945

Passport photos are taken for the passport issue at the Berlin Jewish Community tomorrow.

13/11/1945

Passports all done. Now we are waiting on Kaszik's imminent return from Lodz.

15/11/1945

Last night a document check took place. We were left alone, apart from having to give away some large amounts of money. To the room arrived a lot of people, a good few of which were dishonourable [unscrupulous, or corrupt], I wish to leave here as soon as possible.

17/11/1945

Kaszik returned yesterday and we have been to UNRRA where our departure from Berlin was scheduled for 21/11/1945.

22/11/1945

UNRRA in Berlin, still filling in official documents [we have a copy], by now we are prepared to go.

23/11/1945

10:30 we leave Berlin on a truck, via a route that should have taken 4-5 hours - we have gone for for 11 hours due to driver's lack of directions, having stayed the night at a small station.

24/11/1945

We resumed the travelling in the morning, by train now. Arrived in Kassel [about 340km south west of Berlin] in the evening.

25/11/1945

Noon arrival at Frankfurt for the evening Munchen [Munich] train. Having boarded the evening train we were removed – that carriage was reserved for military use. We were left at the station all night, alighting the Munchen train early morning.

26/11/1945

A good journey on the fast service brought us to Munchen for the evening. No direct trains to Feldafing, we used connections via Starnberg where we stayed the night at the station 9km from Feldafing.

27/11/1945

Morning arrival at Feldafing where we were to do further paperwork and assigned into opposite unisex rooms. I have met people from Czestochowa (some in my room) and also from Shwoll [?] (Lithuania).

Czesa was ill and travelled with Kaszik to Landsberg [-am Lech, a town 40km north west].

28/11/1945

Now sorted at Feldafing, we thought we ought to press on to Italy because the chances of getting to Israel are better from there.

02/12/1945

Today is six years since I have moved out of Czestochowa, that was the day I have last seen my beloved parents.

15/12/1945

Today I have guests, they are my good old friends Ester Eizner and David Mendelowic; Kaszik was here a few days ago too.

Our political activity is intensifying. We are preparing for the Academy (Convention) of Borokhov. This is the opening of our Party's operations at Feldafing.

I am not working at all, very boring. I contemplate doing some work.

18/12/1945

I now realise for the first time, my big mistake: I should not have parted from Sarah [see above 28/10/1945 & 03/11/1945]. I recognise she has plenty of criticism towards me, and not entirely unjustified. If only I had known I would have had it sorted at the time.

03/01/1946

Happy 1946! How happy? I have my doubts.

The Borokhov Academy at the camp was very successful. We are about to launch the local camp elections. Our Party had started the conception of establishing a kibbutz. That would make me very happy indeed.

13/01/1946

We celebrate 25 years for the establishment of the Workers' Association.

Our Revisionary "friends" from the Union party, have demonstrated to us that fascist methods in our social lives are not beneath them.

I had guests, Zelda Makowska (my Czestochowa nest-door neighbour) and her husband.

14/01/1946

The [camp] leadership election which had previously been agreed by the various political parties had taken place today.

I am off to Landsberg today to meet a few of my old friends from Czestochowa.

16/01/1946

Back in Feldafing.

22/01/1946

All day in Munchen with my sister. We have found out about two cousins now in the city: Leibo Rotholtz and Shaie Rotholtz from Szarek [? a village in northern Poland] (thereafter Sosnowiec [near Katowic]). Alas the opportunity to meet up had not arisen.

23/01/1946

I have received a visitation by Braszberkowic- my old chum from the Labours of Zion Left Party. I had realised earlier that he survived in Germany, but I have no way to make contact. I am delighted to have met a real good old friend.

24/01/1946

Today is election day for the Party's leadership. Dankwic and Yaakowic our friends are amongst the new leadership.

26/01/1946

Today the Party is celebrating the new leadership. It has been a good celebration amongst a friendly crowd.

My cousin Shaie Rotholtz from Szarek visited me today. It was a very sentimental first-time meeting between us.

27/01/1946

Hadasa and I have been invited to cousin Shaei [in Munchen?] where he told me that his sister Itka and cousin Leibo who were married at the time [more married cousins...] are also in Munchen. Hadasa and I have gone looking for them in Munchen but could not find their place of abode.

Back at Feldafing late evening, I have found on my bed a letter addressed to me. It said that Hadasa is to take the first train to Leipheim [halfway to Stuttgart] on her way to Israel. I have decided to see her to Leipheim.

28/01/1946

We arrived at Leipheim. Not having read our referral letter - they have given us a chilly and mistrustful reception. I do hope Teddek is coming to Leipheim tomorrow to resolve matters, for now I stay the night in Leipheim.

01/02/1946

The Alia [the act of immigrating into Israel] Committee had already taken place and concluded that Hadasa is not going to Israel. Teddek hadn't made it after all. After much hope and disappointment, the committee decided that Hadasa must go back to Landsberg where her case would be settled. I join her to Landsberg arriving late evening. The meeting had already taken place - inconclusive for us. I have met Ruth Moszkowitz and Schlomit Gordon in Landsberg.

Teddek suggested that we should follow the committee to a place called Pocking [a Bavarian municipality in the Starnberg district, 2km north of Feldafing]. I doubt any good would come out of this, yet we decided to go there together. We arrive at Pocking in the evening, and spend the night on a bench at the kibbutz.

02/02/1946

The Pocking kibbutz is where I have met my old-time friends Khaim Moszkowitz and Avraham Sterling. Not many Jews in this camp of large capacity. We await the Alia council.

05/02/1946

after all said and done, the matter had been resolved much more favourably than I ever expected. The Council had authorised both Hadasa and myself to make Alia. Tomorrow we are off to Feldafing to collect our belongings, Teddek demands that we return to the kibbutz.

06/02/1946

Munchen, evening. Due to a late train we can not make it back to Feldafing.

07/02/1946

We are back in Feldafing again, all my acquaintances thought that Hadasa and I have departed to Israel. I attend a lecture at Borokhow House.

11/02/1946

I am all packed up and prepared. Hadasa and I have been told to be on the ready. Tomorrow morning we are going to the kibbutz at Pocking, from where we are meant to be going to Israel.

12/02/1946

Arrived at the kibbutz in Pocking in good time, we have managed to find everything in the end, I worried we might be late.

14/02/1946

As a kibbutz representative, I am going to Landsberg to bring some money.

15/02/1946

In Landsberg I have met my cousin from Wladyslaw [?. Poland?] Yankel Rotholtz whom I have never met before. I fulfil my mission and return to the kibbutz.

17/02/1946

Back on the kibbutz. To me, it doesn't look as if we will be in Israel any time soon.

20/02/1946

The camp is called Waldstadt Lager, the entire camp is called Pocking as it is only 5km from a German town called Pocking [Confusing geographical names: There is a Waldstadt near a town named Pocking with an umlaut 200km north east of Feldafing near the Austrian border, there is also a town near Wldstadt also named Pocking without an umlaut, no way to discern from Hebrew transcribe].

The human material is somewhat poor here, they can not manage to keep this place organised. It's like a ship without a captain.

11/03/1946

Out of the blue, Kaszik [partner of Csesa's, Hadasa's good friend] had come to see us at Pocking after he had been to Feldafing where he realised that we are here. He asked me and Hadasa to go to Womberg [?] to see Czeska. We agreed, there were rumours we might be summoned to leave anytime soon, and we wanted to say our goodbyes to Czeska. We are off to Womberg this very day.

12/03/1946

Already in Womberg. We have met Czeska and other folk from back in Czesbatochowa. We rushed back, worried we might be late [to Waldstadt]. I was pleased we have made this trip to Womberg.

13/03/1946

Back at Waldstadt, all is in order, we were not late after all.

18/03/1946

We are going to Feldafing for an extra two days, I wanted to visit my acquaintances again.

20/03/1946

I am back on the kibbutz. I was uneasy with wary staying any longer at Feldafing. At Feldafing all remains as it was.

29/03/1946

It seems those who were allotted to make Aliya will be departing over the coming days.

04/04/1946

An announcement arrived, saying we must be prepared to leave that very night. I am not ready yet, it's been a long time since we were supposed to receive some clothing.

05/04/1946

I have said my goodbyes to all before dawn. We are leaving Waldstadt Lager aiming to our destination. The mood is buoyant, all are hopeful that our desires are about to be realised. Following a long wait, at last the joyful day had arrived. Here's hope this will be the last journey to our goal. Along with us also going are others, from the Partisans, Mizrakhi [political movements] and others.

06/04/1946

We might be off today

10/04/1946

We are still in Germany. It's been a few days that we are stationed by the Austrian border which we wanted to cross, immediately followed by crossing into Italy. Alas it seems something had gone wrong and we should be travelling another way tomorrow morning. Here's hope the alternative route would be more successful.

11/04/1946

We depart before dawn, arriving at night to Friedrichshafen (Friedrich's Port) [165km west of Feldafing, Bodensee lake].

12/04/1946

We can see the Swiss mountains across the lake. It's been said that we shall be stopping over at Friedrich's port for two days and continue later on.

13/04/1946

Tonight we leave Lindau, 20 minutes later we are in Austrian territory. Landek [130km south west] for noon and 21:30 we go by car towards Italy.

15/04/1946

Crossing into Italy, having been held up for a long while we have become somewhat agitated. Nonetheless, we have been peacefully let into Italy, yet another leg in the journey to Israel.

16/04/1946

Before dawn we reach Mirano [over 400km south, near Venice]. [unclear text] I have met Hillel and Shlomit Gordon's father (Shlomit was a local in Lithuania).

17/04/1946

Pesakh eve [holiday] at night we travel from Mirano to Milano [over 250km west] arriving in the morning.

Up until Italy the running of proceedings was excellent, in Italy it all fell apart. We have been told that being assigned for Alia from Germany bears no relevance in Italy. To our great dismay, we are now being told to wait our turn.

23/04/1946

All those staying in transfer shelters and schools in Milano are to be transferred to Reggio Emilia, a small town 180km [south east] from Milano. The prospects don't seem so good.

24/04/1946

At Reggio, we are accommodated in horse stables, no beds, sleeping on straw over concrete floors. We feel betrayed. No postal link into Germany, yet people are writing up a deluge of discontentment letters.

29/04/1946

In response to our reference to the decision that we were to be allocated into kibbutzim which have been established prior to our arrival, the Alia bureau in Milano response was that we should come to Milano from where we shall be sent to Mestre [near Venice].

30/04/1946

Milano. Our issues are not going to be resolved anytime soon. We expected no different. That is because the friends we wanted to be with have gone out to the kibbutzim for the First of May festivities.

01/05/1946

International Labourers' Day, we have gone out to the streets of Milano, tens of thousands of people. Our matter will not be resolved before tomorrow and we could only leave on 03/05/1946.

[Never mentioned in his diary, I have extrapolated from my copy of his wife's (Wiza / Hava Landesmann) biography, that they must have met for the first time on the kibbutz Chirigniago in Mestre 02/05/1946].

04/05/1946

At long last Mendel Sodowsky (representative of the Jewish Agency) arrived. The appropriate forms were signed off and we were sent to the kibbutz at Chiringiogo. The majority there were Revisionists and the rest [missing?]. What was not surprising was the cold and hostile reception at the kibbutz [opposing political factions?].

07/05/1946

The rooms are uncomfortable and narrow, but we will manage somehow. We call ourselves Dror [freedom] group. Where possible we decided to conduct our own political and social activities amongst ourselves how we see fit, as a minority.

14/05/1946

Life on the kibbutz is monotonous, not even reading material. On this "kibbutz", since there is no actual work being done, we do what is necessary according to a rota. A day per fortnight kitchen work.

As for Alia, we have no idea how long that would take.

We have posted to Meir [Poliwoda in Israel?] on the kibbutz two packs of undergarments. I have posted a letter to Sarah [past lover from Poland?] yesterday.

15/05/1946

30 of us on the Dror group have visited Venice proper. We have been to St Marco's square and inside the basilica, and taken a gondola trip towards the shore.

01/06/1946

Not a word regarding Alia. Very boring. No letters from Meir.

09/06/1946

Over recent weeks we have received many letters from Meir and photographs of five people.

People from the kibbutz are being called up to Milano for the purpose of Alia. Hadasa had travelled to Milano to talk to those five people about Alia, alas she was unsuccessful. I am going there again with her, perchance something would emerge.

26/06/1946

The last few weeks have given me grief and disappointments. So many transports have set sail to Israel, yet all we got were unkept promises. The entire kibbutz is anxious. Hadasa was hoping to depart two weeks ago but due to Mendel Sodowsky's wrongdoing she was denied travelling yet again.

04/07/1946

Dror group have decided to covertly leave the kibbutz in three subgroups of eight persons each. We have had enough and decided to submit ourselves at the Agency in Milano for them to do with us as they see fit. And indeed, the first subgroup had arrived in Tradate [a city in the Varese province]. The remaining three subgroups are expected to follow the same route. This might be our last station before Alia.

15/07/1946

It seems we will not be staying in Tradate for much longer.

[This was the last entry in Meir's diary, his onward journey is described in his biography]
[I would wish to thank R Michaela, D. Worsley and D. Forrest for their support in the production of this document]

A schematic route map sketched by A 2020 according to the diary. Movement east of the Czeŝochowa region made by January - October 1945. Movements west of that area were made November 1945 – July 1946:

