

# Arkadi Yurkovetski



I after liberation from the ghetto. This photo was taken in Tomashpol in 1944.

There was a German commander office in Tomashpol. Germans appointed a Ukrainian and Jewish senior men. There was Ukrainian police. There was a Jewish community established that included a Jewish senior man and his assistants responsible for keeping order in the ghetto and making lists for work or concentration camps. In late July 1941 Germans ordered all Jews to come to live in 2 central streets in Tomashpol. Our house was within the boundaries of the ghetto.

There were poster announcements in Ukrainian and German on the houses. They said 'Work gives freedom' and contained instructions on gathering points to go to work. People decided that they would be paid for work. There were 126 of young men and women that gathered on the first day at the given point. Policemen convoyed them to the Jewish cemetery and shot all of them.

After this shooting the German commander told chairman of the Jewish community that he had to gather people to install posts around the ghetto and fence it with barbed wire. There was a gate guarded with armed policemen. They ordered us to wear rectangular stars on our clothes. If they caught someone without a star they shot him or her immediately. There was a curfew in the ghetto. Almost every week the Jewish senior man, his assistants and policemen selected groups of inmates for concentration camps. We never saw them again.

There was an old Jew named Nuchim-Tsygele living in the ghetto with his old wife. He was over 80 years old. He had a big gray beard. When the ghetto was under Romanian command Nuchim began to teach 10-12 boys of about my age. He taught us to read and write in Hebrew. We also

studied religion. Every morning and evening we came to Nuchim to pray. I can still remember Hebrew that I learned with Nuchim. It was impossible to celebrate any holidays in the ghetto so poor we were, but we never forgot about a day of holiday.

In a month the Germans left and were replaced by Romanians, which battled on the party of Germany. Life was easier during the Romanian rule. They didn't shoot inmates of the ghetto. They were more interested in money. At least once a month officers from the Romanian commander's office demanded gold and money from the chairman of the Jewish community threatening to send inmates to a concentration camp if he didn't pay them. Jews paid as much as they could to buy off the commander. Romanians subjected inmates of the ghetto to all kinds of tortures. People died of hunger and diseases, but at least there were no shootings.

I went to work. I had to shepherd a herd of cows that belonged to the Jewish kolkhoz before the war. There were few other boys working with me. We received one loaf of bread for all of us.

In March 1944 Soviet troops began their victorious march. Farmers brought us news. Then German retreating troops marched across Tomashpol. Few of them stayed overnight in our house. One of them said that Germany had lost this war. He said he was a shoemaker and had three children. He spoke negatively about Hitler. We understood that our liberation was near. Inmates of the ghetto were afraid of murderous actions that Germans or Romanians might take before leaving, but it didn't happen. On 16 March 1944 Soviet troops entered Tomashpol. All Jews came into streets. They were happy about liberation. Of 5 thousand Jews that were in the ghetto at the beginning of the war only about a thousand survived.