PROTOCOL of a statement by Abraham Kirschner, ceramic engineer and painter, born in 1904, resident of Nikolajow on the Dnjester, near Stryj.

600 Jews lived in our town, but after the German siege all of them were driven into a camp, where they were beaten and some of them killed. Ukrainians and a few Gestapo men executed this order, but after an intervention by a high Ukrainian authority the Jews were released again. The whole year the Jews had to do hard labor for which they got neither salary nor sufficient food, and they were not permitted to buy anything on the market, neither were they allowed to leave certain districts. The children with their thin or swollen legs were a terrible sight, but altogether nothing happened during the first year of the German occupation.

Only the refugees who travelled through our town, (refugees from Lemberg, or those who were returning from the Soviet army), were caught by Ukrainians killed, and thrown into the Dnjester.

In Dec. 41, part of the Jews were brought to the Carpathian village of Huta near the Hungarian boundary, and many hundred Jews, mostly Rabbis, were brought there from different town. There they were all squeezed into a little house, which they were not allowed to leave, and were many of them died of hunger and thirst. The dead stayed unburied in the house together with the living, and daily there were new outbreaks of epidemic illnesses, like scabies. The house was guarded by Ukrainians, but when the Jews saw that certain death awaited them there, they tried to escape. Many of them froze to death on the way, but a part returned to our town where the authorities tolerated them for great bribes.

We heard about the massacres of Jews in various towns, and were afraid of such actions in our town, but until Oct. 42 nothing much happened. Then the Gestapo together with Ukrainian police and OD occupied our town, drove all the Jews out of their houses and into the Synagogues, where the old and weak were shot immediately. Within two days the Jews were collected into trucks (without food or drink) which were to bring them to Belsen. Sick people had to go directly from bed into the trucks, without shoes or clothing. Only some few who were able to remain in Nikolajow, until they were found, robbed, undressed and shot. Only those who were busy in stone-quarries, or with raw material collections were taken out of the trucks. As technical manager of a big ceramic factory, I was spared together with my family.

For much money the women and children were given special legitimations by the Gestapo; but after two weeks these were declared to be invalid, so that the families and children had to leave and only people at work remained. I shall not give a detailed account, but shall mention the following incident:

An elderly clerk of the "Alba" firm was found by the builder’s foremen together with his children hiding in the quarry, and they beat him mercilessly. He escaped and hid all the year among the corn and in the woods, until a shepherd found him, who asked for and received a bribe from the Jew, but nevertheless went to the Police; later laborers who knew the Jew noted that he was being beaten. Under some pretext they managed to bring him to the factory where I was able to give him a job with 45 other Jews. But one day all of them were taken to Stryj and shot.

Often we are asked why we do not defend ourselves. There are two reasons:
1.) We never knew where we were brought to, but thought we only had to change our living or working place.

2.) Besides the fact that the people had no arms, they had become too apathetic, weak and intimidated to attempt an organized defence.

So only I and my family and a few others who had managed to hide themselves remained; I was in contact with them but every day another disaster occurred: Here somebody was found out, there one was betrayed by his neighbour, another had no money any more and the peasants refused to keep him any longer, and so on. In all such cases the Jews were beaten terribly and then shot. I lived apart from the Jewish world until May, 1943, until SS-Obersturmführer Sander came to me one day, talked shop with me, and said among other things: "You won't stay here now but come with me. You need not be afraid, you and your family will be better off than before, you even won't have to wear the arm-band any more." My boss (a German) went immediately to Lemberg and procured an "iron letter" for me from the chief commissioner of police, which protects the owner even from the Gestapo. But Sander saw to it that this letter was annulled.

One day two SS men (one was called Minkus, the other SS Hauptscharführer Schweinshaupt) took me and my family with a car to Drohobycz into the ceramic factory.

I came to Drohobycz one day after an action, and just on the first day I saw a very strong Jewish peasant passing the factory and being caught by the commandant of the "Werkschutz", Rinkus, who threw a tile at his head so that blood gushed forth. The peasant had enough strength left to rise and try to strangle Rinkus; but then other members of the "Werkschutz" attacked him, threw him to the ground and shot him.

What was the "Werkschutz"?

It consisted of released prisoners from the Russian army who had become members of the SS, and were much worse than the Gestapo, especially Rinkus. They provided the factory guard. I think Rinkus was a Lithuanian; he was the worst murderer of the lot. The other members of the Werkschutz were chiefly Ukrainians, with a few Russians among them.

It was impossible to escape from the factory because it was surrounded by barbed wire, guard towers and machine gun posts; this was because the factory was at the same time a concentration camp for Jews. Immediately after my arrival I organized the department of ceramic art; I taught painting to young Jewish girls and obtained unusually fine results. But none of the girls were spared during the action which followed soon. It was said about this time that 300 Jews would be sent to Glimna Navaria to work in the lime factory there. There was a camp consisting of 200 Jews already at Glimna. At a roll call these 300 people were to be chosen, but many who had relatives at Glimna volunteered to go there, and even paid money to do so. On the way there they were all massacred. Some of them offered resistance, and others jumped out of the carriages; I do not know what happened to these.

Only very few Jews still remained at our place with their families, and those who were left all began to look out for hiding places. One day Sander suggested to me that I should give my ten-year-old son a job in the factory, which I did. The boy was quick at his work and astonished everybody by his ability. But even then it happened every day that someone was shot, often without the slightest reason. Thus for instance when a German official sent to the Commander for a Jewish barver, the man was shot by members of the Werkschutz on his return; or another time, when Schweinshaupt noticed a Jewish driver buying himself cherries he ordered him to be shot.
A number of people actually were sent as far as Glina, but they were killed later. This action was carried out by the Schutzpolizei (Schupo, German police) of Lemberg, who liked to take a hand in such executions because they presented excellent opportunities for enriching oneself; the victims were robbed of their possessions before the shooting, and even their gold or platinum teeth were broken out.

Then 500 of us who were still at the factory of "Klinks and Cement" (Dachov Oswarz) were assured that we need have no fear of further action being taken, and that we should get ready for the winter, obtain warm clothing, build barracks, etc. We were not taken in by that, however, and everybody was looking for safe hide-outs, digging underground burrows or rigging up stoves in sewage ducts. All this proved little effective when the sudden swoop came one day at 4 a.m. We were woken to see the whole place alive with Schupo, Gestapo, soldiers, Ukrainian guards and military police, armed with hand grenades, rifles, and machine guns. The camp was surrounded, but still many attempted to escape and machine guns opened up on them. Some very few managed to slip through into the forest. My children I had concealed for the night in our hide-out, but I was driven out of the apartment with my wife and my mother-in-law at the point of the bayonet and brought to a building where the remaining Jewish officers, engineers, technicians, etc. were assembled. The other camp inmates had been driven into another building. I tried to hide my mother-in-law in an empty chest, but heard later that she was found and shot. Everybody was then led into the prison. The organizer of this raid was Hildebrand, the commander of all Jewish camps of Eastern Galicia, and the Gestapo officer in charge was called Block. I thought of shooting Hildebrand when I stood very near him, or notwithstanding a thorough investigation they had not found my revolver; but I did not do it because it would have meant my certain death, and I then still hoped to save my children. All weapons including pocket knives had been taken away from us. In front of the prison gate one Jew suddenly shouted something and tried to escape, but was shot. We were squeezed into the prison, men and women apart; half and hour later skilled men and technicians were separated from the rest, but doctors were not spared. 60 of us were led to the refinery of the Beskides OIl Industry, where 300-350 men worked, under the command of a half-Jew called Weintraub, who treated the Jews worse than the Gestapo did. I wanted to get at my children who had now been in hiding for two days without food. When the things were fetched from the factory I succeeded in getting to the hiding place, but could not see the children as I was watched. I only managed to tell them to keep quiet and wait, and found a German woman who promised to extricate the children at 1 a.m. and hide them elsewhere. But in the evening my children heard that my apartment was being robbed, and the older boy came out and began to cry. The workers noticed the children but dared not hide them. Rinkus heard them, and had them brought, naked as they were, to the wardroom by the Werkschutz where they were detained. A Jewish engineer of the oil company where I worked, Backenroth, was ready to give my children shelter, and gave me his car and an escort. But when we arrived we heard that the children were dead. They had been taken to the prison by Rinkus, and the German director of the factory found no more effective way of showing his humanity than by blaming Rinkus for wanting to drive the children to prison on food, and making him use a horse-wagon. If he had notified me instead I might have been able to save the children. As it was, by boys of 5 and 10 were shot far from their father and mother on the same day, and my wife and mother-in-law were also murdered.

Sander then went to Lemberg; Schweinshaupt assured us that nothing more would happen, but we knew by now that they were lying. On his return from Lemberg Sander met Jews going to work and asked for me. He bade them tell me that he would call on me that night. He was too late as it happened, but I knew what he wanted. He was a cold sadist and wanted to see me and enjoy my grief at
the loss of my entire family. He was a coward, and during the round-up had kept out of sight at the window of this flat as a spectator. Once during a roll-call he ordered a very young girl (in order to escape immediate execution, young girls used to overstate their ages) to fall out and asked her with a good-natured smile "You are not strong, are you, I am sure you would prefer an easy job!" Then he had her shot on the spot.

Not long after, this camp was also liquidated. Many of us procured cyanide, which became a very high-priced article; a fatal dose sold at 1,000 zl. 80 people poisoned themselves in this way, the remainder were put in cars bound with wire, and heaped there in several layers. A few attempts at flight failed. I have been told that our women kept their nerves splendidly, and went to the plank over the communal grave with a song or with cigarettes in their mouths. Some were beaten before being killed. People with gold teeth were executed at a different place, because their teeth were broken out.

Some 20 people thought of rushing the prison, but we had no rigles, and could not leave the camp. I succeeded in making my escape with the help of Backenroth, and went by train to Stryj to find my brother-in-law who was hiding there with a Pole. I found him, but had to leave very soon because of repeated denunciations by neighbours. My father and sister had set out to make for Hungary, so I went after them to join them. I did not meet them here, nor do I know what happened to them. I should not have come if I had known that I would not find them here, for my life is senseless. Alone, without children, wife, or anyone to whom I belong.