

Beniamin Zylberberg



This picture of me was taken in Warsaw in the 1950s.

After I finished officer training school in January 1945 I was sent to Zamosc to do medical courses for the Front. I was second in command of a company there. And the other second-in-command was Joel Kopytko, a friend from my old gang back in Krasnik, who had been arrested with me in 1935. The NCOs in that company were pre-war stock, with anti-Semitic attitudes. As one of them was leaving the unit one evening, Kopytko ordered him to show his pass. 'You miserable Yid!' came the response. A scuffle broke out, and the NCO got a shot straight through the heart. The news spread around Zamosc: a Jew has killed a Pole. We feared a pogrom.

Kopytko was arrested. I had been in prison with the senior prison officer in Lublin before the war, so he let me visit Kopytko, even gave me the keys to his cell. I looked at him - he had his head

bandaged. It turned out that earlier on, when he had been locked up in UB, during an interrogation they had found his Komsomol identification on him. And the people who were interrogating him had transferred to the secret police from the NSZ, so they had given him a beating. A few weeks later they abandoned their posts and returned to the woods. In fall 1945 Kopytko was taken to Lublin for trial. And can you imagine - the same panel of judges tried his case as before the war! As a re-offender he was given ten years' imprisonment. I intervened on his behalf in Warsaw. The news of Kopytko's sentence reached Bierut himself, who had also been in prison with him before the war in Lublin. Kopytko was soon released.

In February 1945 our unit was transferred from Zamosc to Srodborowo near Warsaw, where the Jewish Center is now. In May 1945, when the war ended, I reported to the Department for Personnel Affairs in Rembertow, where I was seconded to a liaison unit. In Lublin, where the central authorities were installed, as Warsaw was in ruins, we ensured communication between the central powers and the province offices. As the trains still weren't running, the Soviet authorities gave us 'kukuruzniki' [planes which were big enough for just one person next to the pilot].

In time I requested a change of work: it was too hard for me; I was so skinny, I weighed only 40-something kilograms. So I was sent to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where I was made head of the codes department. All the encoders in all the embassies and consulates all over the world answered to me. When I traveled on inspections I couldn't travel officially in my professional capacity, and so I was sent ostensibly as a diplomatic courier. In the Foreign Ministry I was promoted to the rank of major in the Polish Army.