The SS-man who was a Jewish partisan.

MIR is a small town of over 5 000 on the map of Eastern Po-land, close to the Russian border. Here, the Jewish population of nearly 2500 was proud of its world famous rabbinical "university", the Mir Yeshivah.

But when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Jews of Mir became the first victims of the nazi terror, forced hard labour, hostage-takings and other extermination operations - which included a mass killing on November 7, 1941. And, in May 1942 the ghetto was established in the ruins of the Mirsky Castle. The Jewish population was then about 800. Among them, a small group of refugees from other parts of Poland, who had fied from the German invaders in 1939.

OSWALD ... ARRIVES

THE ghette was under the jurisdiction of the nazi police and security units of the SS. The new commandant, SS Obersharftihrer Oswald arrived in the autumn of 1942 and soon became intensely involved in the activities of the

But a chance meeting between SS-man Oswald and one of the refigees, Berl Resnik, resulted in one of the most unusual stories to come from World War

Oswald ordered Resnik to his office and then asked: Why don't you greet me with "Sha-lom"? Don't you recog-nise me? I am your friend from the Zionist movement in Cracow?

Berl nearly fainted.

THE REAL **OSWALD**

FEARFULLY, Berl looked again, fearing a trick. But, some min-utes later, he said, yes! Now he remembered the young, tall, blond fellow with blue eyes, not at all Jewish looking, who spoke beautiful Polish, knew German and was well versed in Hebrew!

Oswald smiled, and dropped a bombshell he wasn't SS at all.

He explained.

When he left Cracow ome time before on his way to Mir, he found German papers lying in a bundle by the road-side. Of the German, there was no sign.

He picked them up, and suddenly realised the man described fitted himself perfectly. He was blond and tall "Aryan". There was no reason not to use them. So he passed himself off as a German and joined an organisation of civilian helpers Later he said, he told the authorities that his parents, now dead, were of German origin. They were impressed by the tall blond "Ary-an" and he was recruited to the police. He was trained by the SS and because of his know-ledge of local dialects, was promoted and ap-pointed to Mir — as the police chief.

Now he said, he had been told to expect orders to terminate the Jews of Mir.

"Get friends, and be ready to join the parti-sans in the nearby forests. You have got to leave" he told Berl.

So, at night, the SS officer would come secretly into the ghetto, leave with Berl or his friend, Aron Kech or Shlomo Chayches, take a revolver or rifle, and instruct small groups of volunteers in the basics of hand-to-hand fight-

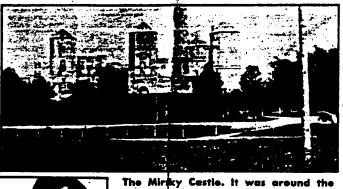
MAMONG the recruits, he met a young printer, Mike Breslin. Soon, Oswald was of-ficially informed of the forthcoming "liquidation" of the ghetto.

He moved fast. Hisinstructions to the men he had trained secretly by night was that they must arrange a mass exodus of Jews to the nearest forest. In the meantime, in his SS status, Oswald proclaimed the ghetto to be of "use-ful Jews", arranged for work on the roads and enlarged the estab-lished workshops of craftsmen. It bought them time.

TO THE FOREST

THEN one Friday in August-1942, Oswald got his orders: "Destroy the ghetto, annihilate the Jews. All within a week".

Immediately he instructed the ghetto partisans to get people hide. In 1969 Breslin was ready to leave on the A month later A par invited to Israel to at





Sunday. They must move south towards the forest. He would take his police force towards the north in a false pur-

SRDS. In the ghetto the par-tisans tried to persuade others to come with them. Many refused, not believing the slaughter to come. The local rabbi, Eli Boruch, however, encouraged the young to go, al-though he, his wife and three small children re-mained. Some did not want to leave their parents; arguments, persussion did not help. Only about 250, in small groups, left the ghetto to the Naluboki and Wolozin forests.

suit of Russian parti-

OSWALD INTERROGATED

BUT Oswald was in trouble. SS Divisional Headquaters Branowicze were suspicious and a high ranking SS-officer arrived to interrogate Oswald. How could so many Jews just disappear into thin air? he was asked.

Oswald made excuses. But he knew his end - at the hands of the Gestapo — could be

Left alone in his office, he grabbed a gun and leaped through the open window into a nearby tall cornfield.

Although shot at and chased, he managed to reach a Catholic monastery on the outskirts of town, where nuns rushed to help him to o hide.

Germani established the Jewish ghetto of Mir. LEFT: Father Daniel — Jewish san, ex 55-officer Oswald. tend a reunion of Jew-

Daniel.

dead

ish Resistance fighters.

fa, in a Carmelite Mon-

astery — and he was now known as Brother

It seemed he had

made a promise to the nuns who had helped

him in Mir to devote

himself to their religion

if he survived the war.

Breslin went to Haifa

and there be was

warmly welcomed by a

man he thought was

He promised to visit

the monk every time he visited Israel — so far

they have met ten times.

Asked about his ex-

loits in the forest,

Breslin modestly says: "I did what I had to do

to avenge the murder...

He was told there that Oswald was in Hai-

ruins of this enciont fortress that the

tisan, to whom Oswald had once fiven a pair of his boot in the shet-to, was focad dead and disfigured after a skirmish with German police. The SS presumed Oswald dead and closed his file.

OSWALD -- THE PARTISAN ...

IN the winter of 1944, a partisan named Ephra-im Cinder met Oswald, who had had to temporarily leave the monastery — because police were making enquiries there.

He asked Cinder about the Jews in Mir,

Ephraim brought him to the Russian command post in the forest. The Soviet interroga-tors did not believe Os-wald's story and ac-cused him of spying.

But Mike Breslin,

who was at this camp, volunteered to defend Oswald and related his exploits with the partisans and Jews of Mir. Oswald was given an order to blow up a train with German soldiers on board. He did just that — proving that he was no spy.

OSWALD IS GONE

IN June 1944 the Red Army liberated Mir and Oswald was velcomed by the survivors. He stayed with Mike Breslin and others who came back to Mir from the forests.

But one day Oswald just vanished. Never to be heard from a

When Breslin settled in South Africa he learnt that Oswald had been seen in Cracow dressed as a monk. In 1969 Breslin was

As told to



XAVIER PIAT by



MIKE BRESLIN, a Capetonian who was apartisan in the forests of Eastern Poland.

of innocent men and vivor of the Holocaust I make it my duty to see Oswald, a Jew at heart, also a survivor who kept his promise."