

THREE

GOING UNDERGROUND

The Anders Army was established in the Soviet Union in July 1941 after the country was attacked by Germany.¹ In an agreement signed in London between General Władysław Sikorski, the exiled Polish prime minister, and Ivan Mayski, Soviet ambassador to the United Kingdom, it was agreed that a Polish force would be created within the Red Army. This force was named after its commander, General Władysław Anders. The Anders Army had seventy thousand soldiers, including five thousand Jews, most of whom were volunteers. In January 1942, Begin was recruited into one of its four brigades.

In late 1942 the Anders Army left its bases in the Soviet Union, joined the British forces in the Middle East, and headed toward the Western Desert. On the way it passed through Iran, Iraq, and Palestine. From the Western Desert it invaded Sicily with the British forces and then continued to Italy and joined the Allied forces in the battle of Monte Cassino and other battles on the Adriatic coast. Thousands of soldiers were killed, among them several hundred Jews.

Many Jews regarded the Anders Army as a means to fight the Nazis, but many looked for another purpose. When the army started moving toward the Middle East, families of Jewish soldiers, as well as orphaned Jewish children, joined the troops. Upon reaching Tehran, the children were placed in the care of messengers who brought them to Palestine on a mission known as the Tehran Children Aliyah (Aliyah [literally “going up”] means immigration to Palestine and later to Israel). When the Anders Army arrived in Israel, most of its Jewish soldiers deserted and assimilated into the local population. This mass desertion was