

# Hermsdorf – The Avengers

## NARRATOR

The Hermsdorf-Schomburg Insulator Company (*Hermsdorf-Schomburg-Isolatoren-Gesellschaft*, or HESCHO) was a munitions factory active during the Second World War. In addition to German workers, numerous forced laborers of various origins were employed there. The largest group of them hailed from the Soviet Union.

Naum Spektor was among those forced laborers. He came from Ukraine, and lived on the factory premises under a false name: Nikolaj Nistschemenko. In reality, Spektor was Jewish. His false identity kept him safe from an almost certain death.

## NAUM SPEKTOR

I worked at a grinding machine. I didn't know what we were producing, but I had to grind it all down. In this factory, there was an illegal anti-fascist organization called "Resistance." It was led by Rudi Scheffel in the fine-grinding shop, the department where I worked. In that factory, I also met a German named Otto Worms. He was a very likable young man. He worked on the machine directly next to me.

## NARRATOR

The resistance group which Naum Spektor mentioned, centered around Otto Worms and Rudi Scheffel, attempted to disrupt production and support the forced laborers. They established connections through conversations at the machines.

Since Spektor spoke German, he acted as an intermediary for the German resistance members and the Soviet forced laborers.

## NAUM SPEKTOR

This Otto Worms kept coming to see me and telling me about what was happening at the front lines. Everywhere, the Germans were shouting that Moscow had already been taken, that Stalin had fled Moscow, and that the Red Army had been completely crushed. But Otto listened to the radio from

London and the Soviet radio. (...) He said, "It's all nonsense what the Germans are saying. Moscow is still standing; no one has taken Moscow.' Then he said, 'You can tell your people that Moscow is still standing—but you must be sure you know exactly who you're telling this to.'

### **NARRATOR**

Naum Spektor began to take an active role in the resistance. Together with six other Soviet forced-laborers, he formed a so-called "Komsomol cell"—an underground communist group. They called themselves the *Avengers*.

### **NAUM SPEKTOR**

Our first objective was sabotage—that is, to produce defective products. We also sought to procure food and help the sick obtain whatever medication they could from the Germans.

### **NARRATOR**

In the winter of 1943, the *Avengers*, with the help of German resistance fighters, planned their biggest operation yet.

### **NAUM SPEKTOR**

One day, we decided to blow up a thermal power plant. (...) We took explosives and several mines and intended to blast the plant. (...) We planted the explosives. Sunday was supposed to be a day off, but that specific Sunday was declared "Day of Aid for the Front," so there was no day off. As a result, we couldn't go through with the demolition that day. We didn't want anyone to get hurt, so we postponed it until the following Sunday.

## **NARRATOR**

The bombing never took place. Spektor's Jewish heritage was betrayed by a fellow prisoner.

## **NAUM SPEKTOR**

He said that I wasn't Nikolai Nischtschemenko, nor was I German—but a real Jew. (...) That's when the surveillance began: who I was in contact with, who came to see me, who spoke to me.

## **NARRATOR**

It was clear that Naum Spektor was in grave danger. Otto Worms began to organize Spektor's escape, with the help of Rudi Scheffel.

## **NAUM SPEKTOR**

That very evening, they dressed me up in the uniform of a member of the Hitler Youth. Otto Worms took me to his home, where I changed clothes. After that, they took me to another house; by then, it was nighttime. I spent a day there. Then Otto Worms and Rudi Scheffel arrived. At first they accompanied me on my journey; later, I travelled with Otto Worms, and then finally continued toward the east by myself. I took the train part of the way and spent my nights in fields, mostly in haystacks. In this way, I reached Poland. (...)

## **NARRATOR**

Spektor's escape was successful, but it did not go unnoticed. A wave of arrests swept through the Insulator Factory.

On March 11, 1943, Otto Worms was also arrested. The same night, he was murdered while in Gestapo custody.

The fate of the other members of the resistance group cannot be reconstructed. According to East German literature, at least seven other Germans were also arrested and convicted of high treason by the Jena Higher Regional Court in March 1943.

Naum Spektor was later recaptured and deported to Auschwitz in 1944. From there, he was transferred to other concentration camps. In 1945, he was liberated by Red Army troops.

Many years later, the State of Israel posthumously awarded Otto Worms the honorary title of Righteous Among the Nations.