

WARSAW GHETTO

1st PARAGRAPH OF ZIVIAH LUBETKIN account - "The Ghetto was Burning"

"The ghetto was burning. For days and nights it flamed, and the fire consumed house after house, entire streets. Columns of smoke rose, sparks flew, and the sky reflected a red, frightening glow. Nearby, on the other side of the wall, citizens of the capital strolled, played and enjoyed themselves. They knew that the 'Jews were burning.' The wind blew smoke and soot from the burning ruins in their direction. Sparks scattered and now and then a house outside the ghetto would catch fire. But these flames were immediately extinguished. Only in the ghetto, no one hastened to put out the flames, to come to the rescue. Everything was burning and there was no one to halt the blaze."

Thus began the final tragic chapter of the Warsaw Ghetto, a ghetto like others in some respects, yet set aside from other Jewish ghettos by the story of heroism which marked its end.

You see - Ghettos played an important part in the Nazi destruction process.

From ghettos - Nazis reaped 3 benefits

1. Isolation and concentration for purposes of deportation.
2. Ghetto itself serves as an instrument of mass murder through starvation and disease.
3. Ideological function - We were sub-human - We survive only as parasites.

What better way to prove these than to crowd Jews into a ghetto and dehumanize us.

Once Jews reduced to level of animals Nazis could point at us and say "We are right. The Jews are sub-humans."

In pre-war Poland, there were 380,000 Jews in Warsaw - 20% of the population
Once the Nazis conquer Poland, the persecution of the Jewish community begins.

In the latter part of the summer of 1941, the Jewish community under orders from the Nazi occupiers begin to wall itself in.

October 16, 1940 -Nazis issue a decree telling Jews to move into Ghetto (120,000 Jews) and Poles to move out (80,000 Poles)

November 15, 1940 -All exits to the Ghetto were cut off. The excuse was that it as a quarantine measure against disease.

Large signs posted - Danger Epidemic Zone

And thus the Warsaw Ghetto was created

It consisted of two sections -

A large Ghetto &

a small Ghetto

Bridge over Chlodna Street - major highway out of Warsaw

Emanuel Ringelblum -the famous historian of the Warsaw Ghetto wrote "We are returning to the Middle Ages."

Actually - The situation was much worse

In the Middle Ages, Ghetto

a. defended us from attack by the mob

b. easy access to synagogue

c. was not a prison - Jews could leave by day & do business

By contrast -

The Nazi Ghetto was a hellish prison. A prison full of

1. disease & starvation

2. forced labor

3. death

In the Warsaw Ghetto, everyone felt the loss of human rights & freedom

At first for some it was things like

1. telephones removed

2. mail censored and controlled

3. no parks or plants

4. oldest part of town - run-down

Three major things everyone felt:

1. Overcrowded conditions*

By the time the Ghetto was walled in, 20% of the population was living in
100 acres = 3% of Warsaw's land

6 people per room

Eventually the Nazis force another 100,000 Jews into the Ghetto and this
ratio grows even greater

One girl in Warsaw wrote:

"My ears are filled with the deafening clamor of crowded streets and the cries of people dying on the sidewalks. Even the quiet hours of the night are filled with the snoring and coughing of those who share the same apartment or, only too often, with the shots and screams which come from the streets."

2. There was very little coal to be had for heating

Coal referred to as black pearls

Ringelblum -

"The most powerful sight is that of freezing children dumbly weeping in the streets with bare feet, bare knees and torn clothing."

Most of all, we felt:

3. Hunger

The Nazis figured that in the Ghetto we would starve to death.

According to the Nazi commander in Poland, the Jews of Warsaw received only 180 calories per day.

Accordingly, the Nazi goal of exterminating us through starvation should have been accomplished in a matter of months.

And in the 1st year of the Ghetto, from the summer of 1940 to summer of 1941, 80,000 of us will die of starvation and disease.

Hunger hits everyone

Potatoes become like gold

Yet, hunger not only kills, it disables.

Fatigue

Dizziness

Nausea

Vomiting

Diarrhea

These were

all

too common

Disease -

Kills many of these 80,000 especially among infant and the elderly

Why didn't more of us die in that year?

Three reasons

1. We came to terms with the situation.

Jews innovate to survive

Smuggle in food

Smugglers were

a) Children. Children less than 12 years old did not have to wear badge

b) People who worked outside in factories

c) Hevra Kaddisha - people buried outside the Ghetto - Point out cemetery. Once a cow was smuggled back into the ghetto in a hearse coming back from the cemetery.

To eat was to resist

We come to terms with the situation by trying to do everything possible to prevent disease

Germans had expected epidemics,

But

Jewish doctors and nurses become heroes in Warsaw Ghetto.

A vast network of medical services is established.

Typhus which at that time would usually kill 25% of population only kills 15% in Warsaw.

2. Family Life - a second reason why more of us did not die
Extended families are taken in
Marriages continue
Divorces cease

3. We do everything we can to keep despair away.
Low rate of suicide in Warsaw Ghetto.

Jews of Warsaw sing:

"Listen here Haman

Jews will settle scores

You will get yours

Jews have lived and will endure -

But you Haman, you will go straight to Hell."

Yes:

We survive that hellish year because we decided that our existence as a people will not be destroyed. Individuals may be destroyed but the Jewish community will live on.

THE JUDENRAT

Officially, the head of the Jewish community was the Judenrat
The Official Community - The Judenrat

Judenrat = Jewish Councils

Two Roles

- A. to meet German demands - example had to supply forced labor
- B. to serve Jewish needs
 - 1. Feed the hungry
 - 2. heal the sick

How?

Organize:

- 1. Public kitchens
- 2. Hospitals
- 3. Orphanages (Korchak)
- 4. Jewish industry (if Jews are productive they won't kill us)

Represented Jews

- 1. Petitions to Nazis
- 2. Bribery

Jewish Police

Jewish Police - different breed - out to save themselves

But

After a while the Judenrat becomes completely disrupted

Why?

- 1. Too much representation of German needs - "Nazi tool"
- 2. Too much internal fraud

Therefore, new organizations arise to challenge the Judenrats authority (go to alternative community)

The Alternative Communities - Voluntary organizations

Despite the attempt of the Germans to dehumanize us, we insisted on maintaining some sort of assemblance of organized society & culture.

Why?

Represents spiritual resistance

Despite it all

Jews try to provide themselves with art; literature; education and religion

1. Synagogues
2. Social Welfare Agency
3. Youth Centers

These were all voluntary and self supporting

Established solely for raising the level of Jewish life.

Social Welfare Agency Center

- a) food
- b) children
- c) other forms of social services

Branches

By 1942 - 412 Branches in Warsaw

Young people like you provided the backbone for this agency

How?

1. cared for children
2. collections - example - the poor people were asked to contribute a spoonful of flour or sugar toward a general collection to help those who were still poorer
3. organized entertainment
4. Warned tenants about the arrival of the Jewish police or the SS

These branches or committees of the Jewish Social Welfare agency gained people's trust, protected them and becomes of opposition to the Judenrat.

Religious Life

Many synagogues, yeshivot,, courts

Even though the observance of Judaism was outlawed - 600 secret minyanim in Warsaw

Prayer

Passages written during the crusades recited everyday. Not just on Tisha b.AV

Why?

- They expressed immediate daily concerns

- Observance of Kashrut ceases, too difficult
- Seders - beet juice instead of wine
- Shabbat - impossible - Jews forced us to work

Education & Culture

Jewish schools closed

But Jews continued to study in secret

Card playing was popular

Acting

Music

All these to help forget our terror

Dance

Jokes

Cultural Societies - offered courses and lectures

Secret archives - Oneg Shabbat

- Emanuel Ringelblum records life and history of Warsaw Ghetto

In such a way, the Jews of Warsaw won a spiritual victory over the Nazis

Amid terror, starvation and disease, they helped to hold on to humanity and enrich Jewishness

There was, however, one other unofficial community, The Counter Community

The Counter Community - The Political Underground

Jewish political parties exist prior to 1939 - but this system was for the most part shattered by the Nazis

Political Parties were outlawed

Have to go underground

- Socialist groups

- Zionist groups

Both carry on underground activities + an underground press (girls smuggle info out)

Warsaw - late Friday Night - April 17, 1942

50 Jews seized in their homes by the Gestapo and shot on the street.

Became known as "Bloody Friday"

Most of those murdered were associated with the underground press.

Eventually it is from these underground political movements that armed resistance will be organized

Refused to be led like sheep to slaughter

Jewish combat organization (ZOB) formed in Warsaw in October 1942

Later on Betar organization formed - Jewish Military Alliance

Strategy

How do you acquire weapons where and when to fight?

By the end of 1942, horrifying news of mass deportations reaches Warsaw
Underground press carries these stories on 3rd or 4th page

Why?

Too hard to believe

1st page items were world military developments

By the spring of 1942 -

The Ghetto is on the verge of disaster

Jews are nervous - Near Panic

Everyone had heard of mass deportations

Some Jews had come back with the most horrifying tales

And the deadly chronology began

May 4th - Nazis demand lists of all workers

Panic in the Ghetto

July 18th - 40 freight cars arrive at the R.R. Station - Umslagplatz

Once again panic

July 19th - Himmler's resettlement order - All Jews in Poland to be destroyed by December 31, 1942

July 20th - Adam Czernikow assured by German official that deportations would not take place

July 21st - Czernikow and wife are taken hostage
Czernikow told - 6,000 Jews a day or we kill your wife - Chooses suicide

[MEMORIAL TO HIM IN THE GHETTO]

July 22nd - EREV TISHA B' AV

Deportations begin
5,000 - 6,000 Jews a day to Treblinka

From July 22, 1942 til October, no coordination among resistance groups

Why?

1. The extent of exemptions anesthetize our will to resist.
The individual strove to acquire and keep his protective scrap of paper as if it had some permanent value.
2. People were waiting for the Judenrat to do something.

Yet -

By the end of July, we observed that the same wagon numbers returned on trains to the Umshagplatz after 12-14 hours.

Still -

The majority of the people oppose resistance.

Why?

- * Felt it would jeopardize the safety of the entire community.
- * People who came voluntarily would receive bread and food.

By September - 10,000 Jews a day are being deported.

By R.H. only 60,000 Jews remain. 310,000 had been deported

By this time the Ghetto is merely a collection of abandoned and destroyed buildings with people living here and the streets strewn with dead bodies

Size of Ghetto after Great Deportation

People live in three main areas or sub-ghettos

1. The Central Ghetto
2. The Brush Factory District Ghetto
3. The Shop District Ghetto

People were allowed to continue working in the Prosvta Street Ghetto area

September 20th - Underground Paper "On Guard" -Lead article - The Annihilation of Warsaw Jews"

"Today every Jew should know the fate of those resettled. The same fate awaits the remaining few left in Warsaw. The conclusion then is: Don't let yourself be caught!" Hide, don't let yourself be taken away, run away, don't be fooled by registrations, selections, numbers and roll calls. Jews! Help one another. Take care of the children. Help the Illegals. The dishonorable fractions and helpers - the Jewish

police - should be boycotted! Don't believe them, beware of them. Stand up against them.

We are all soldiers on a terrible front.

We must survive so that we can demand a reckoning for the tortured brothers and sisters, children and parents. who were killed by the murderers herd on the battlefield for freedom and humanity!

The report came too late for the 300,000+ Jews of Warsaw already deported.

But

It heralded the resistance to come.

In Warsaw by September 1942, the Underground had substituted for the Judenrat, October 20 - Jews finally coordinated their defense - 1st operation Lejkin head of Jewish Police assassinated

Many Jews hide

November 1942. Germans offer amnesty, food & employment to those who come forward & reveal hideouts.

Jewish Fighting Organization + Jewish Military Alliance combats Nazis with the press and the gun

January 18, 1943 - German troops surround Ghetto - takes JFO by surprise - sets up headquarters at #10 SS Command Center

Nevertheless, JFO counterattacks near Umslagplatz

50 Germans killed or wounded

Only a few Jews deported

JFO suffers heavy losses, but then bold resistance inspires the Ghetto

Proof that the Germans could be beaten

Resistance gains support of the community

February 1940 - 5 Jewish police shot

Organizes into 22 units

Weapons were extremely scarce - 61 guns in 7 months (point out guns IN MUSEUM)

But morale was high

On January 21, Warsaw Jews send the following secret radio message

"We notify you of the greatest crime of all times, about the murder of millions of Jews in Poland. Poised at the brink of annihilation of the still surviving Jews, we ask you :

1. Revenge against the Germans
2. Force the Hitlerites to halt the murders
3. Fight for our lives and our honor
4. Contact neutral countries
5. Rescue 10,000 children through exchange
6. \$500,000 purposes of aid

Brothers - The remaining Jews in Poland live with the awareness that in the most terrible days of our history, you did not come to our aid.

Respond, at least in the last days of our life."

What was the result of the Revolt of January 18, 1943?
Deportations stop for 3 months

Meanwhile

The Germans & the Jews prepare for Battle

Who were these Jewish fighters?

Young people

Leader was Mordecai Anielevitch - 23 years old

Most had been members of Zionist Youth Group

Mordecai had decided that the question is not whether or not we

will die.

In his view everyone will die

For him the question is "How shall we die?"

He answered: We have decided to die in Battle.

And therefore, during those months after January 18, Mordecai

Anielevitch

1. Organizes his fighters
2. Tries to smuggle in more arms
3. Makes homemade grenades
4. Dug secret bunkers and tunnels
5. sets up tank traps

To a friend Mordecai Anielevitch writes:

"We don't have a moments rest. We sleep in our clothes.

At every entry to the Ghetto we stand guard day and night. We are making final preparations. Soon we shall have to separate ourselves from life and go to the place that no one wants to go. But ours is the correct path, for we have cultivated in our hearts the idea of revolt."

April 17 - Major General Jurgen von Stroup arrives in Warsaw to coordinate the German attack

April 19 - The eve of Passover - the Battle begins

The Germans attack using howitzers, machine guns, tanks, armored vehicles

At every place they attack they are met by fierce Jewish resistance

By 5:00 p.m. the Germans, surprised and shocked by resistance, withdraw with 200 dead and wounded.

That night, there was joy in the Ghetto

One survivor later recounted:

"We were happy and laughing. When we threw our grenades and saw German blood on the streets of Warsaw, which had been flood with so much Jewish blood and tears. A great joy possessed us."

They all knew they would lose.

Nevertheless, the Jews now embraced and kissed one another

That night, a seder was celebrated amid gunfire.

Imagine the reading of the Haggadah on that night.

The Jews continue to fight.

The Germans continue their attack the next day.

On the fourth day, Stroup observes:

"Over and over again, we observed that Jews and bandits, despite the danger of being burned alive, preferred to return to the flames rather than be caught by us."

On the sixth day of the fight the Nazis had captured 25,000 Jews, but had taken heavy casualties.

The Germans continued to comb out Jews, setting fire to buildings and throwing poison gas into sewers and bunkers.

On May 8, Mila 18 #26 - The headquarters of the Jewish Fighters, the command post of Mordecai Anielewicz is captured.

The fighters inside choose kiddush Ha-shem rather than surrender.

May 16th - The synagogue only thing that remains

Sniper fire from Jews continued from Jewish quarters throughout most of the summer

What was left when it was over?

A smoking wilderness, blood soaked debris of Yiddish and Hebrew books were all that remained of 1000 year old civilization of Jews in Poland.

42 days after the revolt, the Nazis announce:

"The former Jewish Quarter in Warsaw is no longer in existence."

What can be said of the revolt?

1. 100's of German soldiers killed in revenge.
2. Polish population sees that the Germans were vulnerable.

This encourage resistance.

3. The revolt had held out against the Nazis longer than the Poles when Germany attacked Poland.
4. New image of the Jew in the eyes of the non-Jew no longer perceived as spineless creatures.
5. New Jewish self image. The 1st national military struggle of the Jewish people since the Bar Kochba revolt had occurred. After 1808 year Jews were again fighting back.

The revolt encourages other revolts among Jews.

Perhaps the best comment on the revolt was made by its leader Mordecai Anielewicz. {READ AT MILA 18}

"I cannot describe the conditions in which the Jews of the ghetto are now "living." Only a few exceptional individuals will be able to survive such suffering. The others will sooner or later die. Their fate is certain, even though thousands are trying to hide in cracks and rat holes. It is impossible to light a candle, for lack of air. Greetings to you who are outside. Perhaps a miracle will occur and we shall see each other again one of these days. It is extremely doubtful.

The last wish of my life has been fulfilled. Jewish self-defense has become a fact. Jewish resistance and revenge have become actualities. I am happy to have been one of the first Jewish fighters in the ghetto.

Where will rescue come from?

Mordecai Anilewicz"
During the Revolt,

1943

Warsaw

Where will rescue come from?

For Mordecai Anielewicz and his comrades it never came.

50 Jews, however, do manage to escape through the sewers.

Spend 48 hours in Sewers, Get out near Provst Street, hijack truck, go to forest and joins partisans

Stress effect on other Ghettos and camps (to Treblinka)

The partisans continue the fight.

PERHAPS TEACH PARTISAN'S SONG

Lets learn their song and sing it with a pride benefitting the heroism of the
Warsaw Ghetto revolt.