

The Underground Movement

Once the German occupation forces had marched in, any cultural and political activity was forbidden. In view of the events in an entire array of cities in Poland, the idea ripened in Częstochowa to form an underground movement, one that would train the youth for an armed, resistance struggle.

At the beginning of 1942, the active communist figure Heniek Tencer returned from Lemberg [Lwów]. The first task was to raise enough funds to purchase small arms in order to practise for offensive and defensive battles (partisan training), to learn how to handle weapons, to become acquainted with the woodland environment and to form combat units.

The collection of money for these purposes was made in the name of the bygone Polish national fund - the "Dar Narodowy" [National Gift]. The tickets of the collection books were for 10, 20, 50 and 100 złoty.

Under the leadership of Heniek Tencer, a committee was formed comprising Sumek Abramowicz, Celnik, Wiernik, Zborowski, Zyskind Brzoski, Szmul Zelewer, Leon Zelewer and others. The first transaction, in connection with the purchase of weapons, took place on a Friday in July 1942. The seller was a Pole, and the rendezvous point was set at Zilberszac's confectionery on the I Aleja 11. He was to hold a newspaper in his hand and carry his coat on his arm. The Pole arrived at the appointed hour. The offer was for fifty pistols - small 6.35 and 7.65 calibre ones, and 9.00 calibre ones as war pistols. For each pistol, there needed to be two cartridges of bullets. Any additional bullets would cost between eight and twelve złoty each. Each pistol, with two cartridges of bullets, would cost 1,000 złoty.

Handling costs, i.e., for the mediation, were 3,000 złoty. The weapons were to be packed in crates of yeast and be brought in a *dorożka* [low wagon], which would drive up to the *Durchgangshaus*¹ and, from there, everything would disappear. The first transaction was predicted [to cost] in excess of some 50,000 złoty. To raise such a large monetary sum, with poverty reigning in the ghetto, was no easy feat. The sums, which individual people offered to spend, did not amount to the sum required for this purpose. As a result, the plan of buying the weapons had to be set aside.

[What] became relevant was forming organised cells in the separate workplaces. The tasks of the individual active members were designated. Tencer and Sumek organised a cell in the *Möbellager*, Engel on ul. Krótka, and Zelwer on ul. Garibaldięgo. The entire work plan was disrupted by the deportation of the Jewish population in Częstochowa.

In November 1942, the idea of forming partisan groups ripened. In the illegal newspaper *Freedom Tribune*², they read about the struggle of 1,000 Jews in Mezeritch³, who threw themselves at the Germans. This news encouraged them into energetic activity. A meeting

¹ [TN: Ger., "passage-house"; a house with a large gateway at each end through which a cart can pass.]

² [TN: Most likely ref. to the "Trybuna Wolności", the organ of the Polish Workers' Party.]

³ [TN: Although there are several localities called Mezeritch in Yiddish, this is probably a ref. to Międzyrzec Podlaski, but we have yet to find any mention of such a revolt in any other sources.]

was held at Zborowski's house on ul. Senatorska. The High Command was formed, comprising Heniek Tencer, Heniek Wiernik ("Jacek"), Julek Celnik, Romek Fajgenblat, Sumek Abramowicz, Szmul Zelewer and Leon Zelewer. Their definitive duties were to organise cells in all the workplaces and, if something happened, to leave with the organised groups and go to the woods. Zelewer bought three pistols on ul. Garibaldiiego.

On 4th January 1943, the Germans ordered a rollcall in the Rynek Warszawski. The issue at hand was regarding sending away 500 Jews to Radomsko. The two young partisans, Izio Fajner and [Mendel] Fiszlewicz, took pistols with them and reported for the rollcall. At a certain moment, the two partisans started shooting at Rohn, who was carrying out the selection. The pistols jammed and could not shoot. They therefore threw themselves at him with their fists, and the Oberleutnant Sapport was stabbed in the hand in the fray. The result was that the two young fighters paid with their lives and twenty-five others were shot as punishment for the possession of weaponry.

Among the 500 Jews, who were sent away to Radomsko, was also a group from the underground movement. Some of the organisation's members managed to escape before the transport departed. Those, who were sent away to Radomsko, decided to commit suicide by hanging themselves rather than allow themselves to be taken to Treblinka. One comrade, Jadzia Mas, carried out this plan out. The others were unable to do so in time, because they were taken to the railway wagons. When they were inside the wagons, they broke open the bars and jumped out of the speeding train, one by one. The two sisters, Cesia⁴ and Różia Borkowska, managed to return to the "Small Ghetto" in Częstochowa. They survived the War and are currently in the Land of Israel. Others perished under the train's wheels or were hit by the bullets of the German and Ukrainian SS men, who guarded the train and shot at them. Others, wandering on the roads, famished and exhausted, were handed over, by Poles to the Germans, to be shot.

At the beginning of February 1943, a group of ten members of the resistance movement left the *Möbellager* and went into the woods behind Mstów. Another group of six people also left, which included Romek Fajgenblat, Szaul Wargon and others. They returned, because the Polish liaison man told them that it was still too early.

Heniek Tencer sought different contacts on the "Aryan side" Consequently, he was always outside the "Small Ghetto". Poles recognised him and handed him over to the Gestapo, as a result of which he fell as a victim. As a consequence of their commander's death, the leftist [viz. Communist] group joined forces with the *kibbutz*⁵.

There was a theoretical dispute regarding the direction in which the underground movement needed to conduct its activity - whether to leave for the woods or to protect the "Small Ghetto". This question was a problematic one and was not easy to resolve.

They sought connections - to make contact with the Polish partisans. They were able to reach an understanding with a certain "Stach"⁶, who said that he was from the PSZP (*Polskie Siły*

⁴ [TN: *Dosia*, according to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 281.]

⁵ [TN: The author explains in the forthcoming chapter that this was a nickname for the ŻOB in Częstochowa.]

⁶ [TN: Pseudonym of the decorated hero, Stanisław Hanyż.]

*Zbrojne Podziemie*⁷, or the Polish Underground Armed Forces). In September 1942, he received orders to put himself in contact with the ghetto, whereupon he approached the Jewish intelligentsia. Regretfully, he did not receive any reply. He reported this to Warsaw, and was given instructions to leave the ghetto in peace for the time being, but to keep an eye over everything that was happening there. He understood that something was taking shape - that they were seeking armaments and so on. Stach also recounted that the Jew Brzeziński, who distinguished himself in the war against Polish provocateurs, was fighting in his group. Josek Kantor met with Brzeziński, from whom he heard that he had the fullest trust in "Stach".

The second rendezvous point was at ul. Olsztyńska 62, by the cemetery. Those present were the Polish officer Langewicz, Josek Kantor, Marek Berman, Numberg and Zelewer. At this meeting, they held a general exchange of opinions on all the most important matters. Langewicz read, out loud, the appeal of General [Władysław] Sikorski from November 1942, which said that, due to the fact that the Germans were murdering Jews - Polish citizens, there was an obligation to afford them aid, bread and protection. Based on this meeting, fifty people - ten "fives" - were mobilised, with the aid of Mendel Sznur, to march away to the forest. There were trained, Jewish, non-commissioned officers amongst the fifty individuals: Berman - a corporal, Wajnryb - a sergeant, Icek Sieradzki, Natan Fridman, Heniek Rozenchwajg, Józek Jakobson and other non-commissioned officers.

The Polish officer, Langewicz, had been a victim of the Nazi regime himself. His wife and daughter had been sent, by the Germans, to the Oświęcim [Auschwitz] death camp and his house had been burned down. He solemnly declared, that in the war against Hitler, he would fight alongside Jewish soldiers - Polish citizens.

Langewicz had plenty of weapons and the *kibbutz* had the possibility of raising funds. The *kibbutz* clothed each of the "fives" and gave them a pistol. A partisan detachment was formed near Przyrów.

Izrael Tenenbaum and Mordche (a shoemaker from Przyrów), with his wife, came into contact with the forest ranger Galiniak, who said that he belonged to a combat unit. He promised that everyone would be trained and given arms. They bought two pistols and left for the woods. Thirty US fourteen-bullet partisan pistols, which had been dropped from the air, were also purchased. They also prepared German uniforms, which were taken from ul. Garibaldię. Eighteen pistols were also found in a bunker.

The rendezvous point with Langewicz was at ul. Kucelińska 61, which was not far from the "Raków" ironworks. Every day, a *Werkschutz* took a group of twenty Jews from the ironworks to work in the *kamieniołomy* (stone quarries). Whoever needed to settle matters pertaining to the underground movement went along with this group, and slipped away unnoticed into the house. The same happened on the way back. In the small house, there was also a hiding place (bunker). Marek Berman, Numberg and Ewa Lenczner were there.

Langewicz, wishing to show his solidarity with the Jews, once sent out his three adjutants, who disarmed the *Werkschutz* and cut his bicycle apart to prevent him from leaving quickly to fetch assistance.

⁷ [TN: We have as yet found no mention of this group in other sources.]

Poles of the underworld, who lived in the neighbourhood, found out about the house and that there were Jews there. Fuelled by their desire to rob the Jews, they entered the house when only Marek Berman, Numberg, Ewa Lenczner and the Christian woman Wacka [surname] were there. They brought the Jews out of the house and demanded gold and money from them. After robbing the Jews, the hooligans cut up Berman, Lenczner and Numberg with razor blades and threw them into the Kucelinka River.

Bleeding profusely and seriously wounded, all three managed to get out of the river and drag themselves back to the house. This happened on 17th or 18th June 1943. After that, Wacek [?⁸] and Langewicz cast nets to catch the criminals. In view of these events, the Jews in the forest moved ten kilometres further away, towards the Olsztyn woods.

The training with the Jewish partisans was to have been led by a sergeant of the French Foreign Legion, but that never began.

Once, when [Chaskel] Kantor and Mojtek [Zylberberg⁹] were sitting at Langewicz's, two Polish policemen showed up. Langewicz's two adjutants opened fire. One policeman and one adjutant fell. Sometime later, Germans arrived. At that moment, Langewicz was feeling unwell and was running a high temperature, so he pulled back from an armed conflict and made himself scarce. "Stach" took the wounded Ewa Lenczner and fled with her. Kantor and Mojtek also disappeared — but Mojtek, in his great haste, left his *marynarka* [jacket] in the house. The Germans found the *marynarka*, which led to the speedy liquidation of the "Small Ghetto". This was not far from an airfield. The Germans sent out patrols with tracker dogs to capture Langewicz, who fell into their hands. The same happened to "Stach" and Ewa Lenczner.

At the time, there were three groups in the forest, made up of twenty-seven, fifteen and twenty-eight people [respectively]. There were two women amongst them, Baszka Czarny¹⁰ from Płock. The group of fifteen people had a bunker twenty metres underground. On one occasion, when they were cooking supper, Poles surrounded the bunker. A battle flared up between them. For the Jewish partisans, the skirmish was a hopeless one. After using up all their bullets, they fell in the heroic fight.

The other group with twenty-seven people was no longer able to survive in the woods, and decided to come to the camp in the "Raków" Ironworks. When they were crossing the park, Poles apprehended two of them - Chraport and Woznica - and handed them over to the Gestapo, who shot them.

One of the partisans, who survived, was Iziek [Ignacy] Jakubson. He organised a group and awaited orders. In the forest, he chanced to meet a Pole, who had a rifle and, for some time, they were in a territory, which did not have a single German post in an area of forty-eight [square ?] kilometres. They later went in the direction of the Miechów woods, in the hope of joining the Polish underground movement there.

⁸ [TN: Short for Waclaw; we have found no other mention of this individual in this or other Częstochowa yizkor books.]

⁹ [TN: Commander of the ŻOB (Jewish Combat Organisation) in Częstochowa; see regarding this event in Sefer Częstochowa, Vol. II, col. 207.]

¹⁰ [TN: As no other woman is mentioned here, and Baszka Czarny from Płock does not seem to be mentioned anywhere else, we are unable to ascertain who the "two women" were.]

In the meantime, the political situation had completely changed. General Sikorski, the leader of the Polish government-in-exile in London, perished in an aerial catastrophe. His successor, General [Kazimierz] Sosnkowski, took an antisemitic stance and gave orders to the Polish underground movement to shoot Jews. The Jewish partisans had not yet learnt of these orders. A large part of the liaison people had perished and, as a result, they did not receive orders and had no communication.

In Miechów, the commander of the Jewish group, Berman, was summoned to a Polish officer of the underground movement. The two of them set the *parol* (countersign) “*Grom*” [thunder], and he gave Berman the mission to proceed, with the group, to the Polish Ceucemin¹¹ estate, where he proposed that they go through training to prepare for operations. Upon arriving at the estate, the group’s commander, Berman, entered the yard with three other individuals in order to conduct negotiations. The others remained at the edge of the forest. When they left the yard, they were shot with machine guns and fell dead.

The group, that was waiting at the edge of the woods, was surrounded by Polish railway guards. An exchange of fire ensued, which cost numerous lives - only a few individuals were saved. Four of the survivors came to the HASAG-Pelcery camp.

Four other members of the ŻOB (Jewish Fighting Organisation) were in a forest near Radomsko. They were meant to become the pioneers of a Jewish detachment. The Polish AK people fooled them, read out the orders from the High Command and shot them. One of the four, Dzialecki, only pretended to be dead. In this manner, he was saved from certain death and came to Raków and, afterwards, to HASAG-Pelcery.

The Polish underground movement was made up of two opposing factions - the AK (Armia Krajowa [Home Army]) and the AL (Armia Ludowa [People’s Army]). The AK people were supporters of General Sosnkowski, the chief of the reactionary Polish government in London. The AL members were followers of the government-in-exile¹², which had been formed in Moscow, led by Wanda Wasilewska and General [Zygmunt] Berling. The People’s Army (AL) had a positive attitude towards Jews, having, in its ranks, Jewish combatants also.

The Home Army (AK), following Sosnkowski’s rise to power, turned antisemitic - and they helped the German foe to destroy the Jewish resistance movement.

¹¹ [TN: We have rendered this name verbatim as it appears in the Latin-character original, but have not found any mention of it in other sources; the correct spelling in Polish is undoubtedly different.]

¹² [TN: Ref. the Union of Polish Patriots (Związek Patriotów Polskich, ZPP), a political and social organisation for Polish citizens in the Soviet Union, which was sanctioned by Stalin.]