

## The Fighting Organisation's First Operations

With Józef's demise, the Movement embarks on a new path. It is headed by Mordche and Aryje. Admittedly, the Movement's stance had previously been extreme compared to all the other organisations but, from that time onwards, it starts making itself very clear and all its actions are directly aimed at only one target - informing the public of the intentions of the Germans, while organising defence squads whose mission it is to engage the Germans in battle.

Immediately following Józef's death, a proclamation goes out to the Jewish public calling to resist deportation, because deportation means death. Small leaflets also appear, with descriptions of the horrors as told by fugitives from Treblinka. The street's reaction is the opposite of that which is anticipated. The crowd tears up the notices pasted on the walls, cursing the members of the Organisation, whose actions are supposedly casting a disaster upon the ghetto. This sentiment is exploited by the OD men, who incite the public against the members of the Fighting Organisation. They, in turn, compete with each other in "supplying" the number of families needed by the Germans. Some of them even receive special medals of excellence from the Germans for their diligence.

The leadership decides to use force against the Jewish Police. A death sentence is passed on its commander, Mendel Lejkin<sup>1</sup>. It is carried out by Eliaz Różański, a young member of the Movement (the attempt was not completely successful - Lejkin was only severely wounded in the face). Immediately afterwards, a death sentence is passed on one of the OD men who particularly distinguished himself in deportations. He was hung on one of the utility poles in the street. The OD officers recoil a little and the public also registers the descriptions from the death camps more and more.

In that same period, the Fighting Organisation decides to set fire to all the houses of the deported Jews, so that Jewish property should not fall into the hands of the Germans who would appear after the deportation in automobiles and, shamelessly, load onto them anything of value. A sea of flames floods the city day and night and this also hinders the Germans in their deportation operations. One night, sirens are heard - the Soviet Air Force is attacking the city. The lads rush out into the street and set fire to a row of houses. Outside, it is as bright as noon-time. The Russians bomb factories and military targets. Bombs accidentally fall inside the perimeter of the ghetto (on ul. Wolińska and Zamenhofa), but no one is hurt.

The difficulties of deportation grow day by day. The Germans then come up with a satanic ploy. They announce that three kilograms of bread and one kilogram of marmalade will be distributed at the *Umschlagplatz*, free of charge, to everyone. On the following day, many thousands show up there. The Germans reduce the portion to two kilograms of bread and half a kilogram of marmalade, and then to one kilogram of bread and a quarter of a kilogram of marmalade. But, despite this, every day thousands appear. The people show up in the square, take their rations and then attempt to sneak away and bring the bread to their starving families. The ones who excelled in this in particular were the children, who appeared *en masse* to receive the bread and then tried to escape through every hole in the fence. Many of them were killed on the spot, because the Germans shot at anyone who approached the fence. Nevertheless, many tried their luck yet once more. Bread was dearer than life.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: In other sources appears as Jakub Lejkin.]

Every day, refugees from among the deportees arrived in the ghetto. They jumped out of the carriages during the course of the journey. There were even some who had managed to escape from Treblinka itself. They told of atrocities that froze the blood in the hearts of their listeners. Eventually, the Germans declared an end to the deportation and concentrated all those remaining in the Small Ghetto around ul. Miła and Zamenhofa, which was called "The Big Boiler" ("*Der Grosse Kessel*"). The remaining Jews were sorted by different types and, in the end, only about seventy thousand people were left in the Small Ghetto.

During the days of the deportations, the Resistance had not been able to make any attempts at active opposition. In the beginning, its members had *one* gun! A little over a fortnight before the end of the deportations, Aryje Wilner, who had been sent by the Organisation's headquarters to the *Aryan side* to obtain weaponry, sent over a small shipment of weapons. It was brought in by Reginka from the *Merhavia* group. She was caught by the gendarmes with a basket of eggs and a few hand grenades among them. During the inspection, she said that she had received the basket with the eggs, without knowing what was in it, from a lady who had asked her to give it to a friend of hers in the ghetto. They do not believe her and she is sent straight to the *Umschlagplatz*, but she manages to escape and returns to the ghetto. The second shipment is delivered by Aryje himself, with one female member from *Dror*, in a sack of potatoes. The bag contains six or seven grenades, most of them made in Poland, but there are also some old ones, from before the previous war (French with German detonators). All of this is bought for a fortune, even though the value of the weaponry is questionable. The black market arms dealers are suspicious characters from the underworld, who sometimes force people to buy worthless implements, threatening that if they do not buy everything they have, they will turn the buyers over to the Gestapo.

After the concentration of the *Surviving Remnant* in the Small Ghetto, a certain stabilisation comes into life. Most of the ghetto residents work in large workshops making clothes, shoes and brushes. A minority go out daily to work outside the ghetto. The extermination squads go out to the provincial towns to continue their work.