

The Battle of 18th January in Warsaw

In the period after the Great Deportation in Warsaw, the defence organisation was consolidated and its combative character took its ultimate shape. No one believes in the continued existence of the *Small Ghetto* anymore. Everyone knows that the final liquidation can come at any moment. And the determined decision is in everyone's heart - to resist by force.

During this period, all members of the Movement concentrate in a shared flat on ul. Miła 18 (even during the deportation days, everyone gathered in the Landau factory - where they ate together and slept [and] from where they went out to paste notices and set fire to the houses of deported Jews). All the groups and squads are given separate rooms, as is the leadership. The cache of clothes and the pantry are shared - as are the funds. Everyone works, because the obligation to work applies to all in the *Small Ghetto*.

In those days, Aryje secures the primary source for the purchase of armaments and, from time to time, shipments of weapons begin to arrive in the ghetto. The cocktail bottles and the sulphuric acid gradually disappear.

The Fighting Organisation [ŻOB] unites all the pioneering youth organisations, which constitute its nucleus, and additional bodies from Zionist and other workers' parties. Its mission is to resist, by force of arms, any attempt at deportation and to fight both the Germans and the Jewish OD officers, their hated aides, whom the public calls the "Jewish Gestapo".

The smallest battle unit was the "Five". Three "Fives" made up a company, headed by a Company Commander, who was only in contact with the three commanders of the "Fives". The commanders of the squads were under the orders of the Organisation's Central Command, which was headed by Mordche. Since the central ghetto (the streets around Zamenhofa-Miła) was cut off from three smaller labour camps that were in different parts of the city, a close connection between them and the Centre was necessary. This contact was maintained by special emissaries, who moved between the two places, usually through the attics of the half-ruined houses and, sometimes, together with the delivery of bread that left the ghetto every day to the camps.

The Central Command sent special envoys to the *Aryan side*, who made connections with the Polish Underground Movement and, most importantly, obtained weapons. Its representative was Aryje Wilner. Besides him, our comrades Tosia Altman, Tadek (Tuwja Szajngut, *Tel Amal* troop) and Zosia (Astrid Miller¹, *Ha'Galil* troop) operated on the *Aryan side*, who later frequently accompanied the shipments of arms to the provincial towns in the GG and, often, also went out to the Reich.

On 18th January, the first battle broke out in the ghetto. Once again, the Germans entered the ghetto in order to take, from it, fifteen thousand people to "work" in the camps. The Fighting Organisation, however, was already prepared. The stockpile of weapons was admittedly very meagre and included only a total of nine pistols and about twenty hand grenades. But the desire to go into battle against the Germans was so strong, that the fighters paid no attention to the inadequacy of their equipment. During the deportation, a company of combatants, led by Mordche, joined the rows of the deportees. They wore Jewish OD hats and, by doing so, were able to get close to the ranks of the Germans.

¹ [TN: Her codename was "Astrid," and her real name Zosia Miller.]

At the corner of ul. Zamenhofa and Niska, the signal was given and the fighters opened fire. The Germans dispersed in panic but, after a few moments, returned with reinforcements. In front, they sent the Polish policemen who, this time as an exception, were also given rifles. A command was given to also discharge the weapons over [the heads of] the Poles and, in case of resistance, to shoot them also. Many Poles threw down their weapons, but some fought. One grappled with Mordche, who attacked him with his [bare] hands after his ammunition had run out. A few Germans rushed to the policeman's aid, [whereupon] Mordche fled and the Germans ran after him. At the last moment, *Koza* (Icchak Sukenik from the "*Karit*" troop) came to his aid and threw several grenades at the Germans one after the other. The third one exploded and tore two Germans to pieces. The rest retreated. Mordche returned, grabbed the weapons of the killed Germans and disappeared into one of the gates.

Not far from where the battle took place, on the corner of ul. Stawki and Dzika, the Germans entered the "Supply Department" (a large primary school before the War), where Jews worked. One of the Germans caught two young men from the Organisation on the third floor. After a brief struggle, the lads threw him out the window. The Germans, whose fury was provoked by this incident, called for assistance, surrounded the building, shot at it with machine guns and also hurled grenades into it. In the meantime, all the Jews fled and, before leaving, the lads set fire to the warehouses of belongings that had been stolen from the Jewish homes and which were concentrated in the "Supply Department".

Battles similar to these also broke out in other locations. Upon entering houses or courtyards, the Germans were attacked with hand grenades thrown from the ambush positions. The girls fought mostly using "bottles". They also used small axes which had been intentionally prepared for that purpose. Many Germans fell in these skirmishes and, on the part of the [resistance] fighters, there were almost no casualties. Only in one case, when a squad was sent in to release a fighter who had fallen into the hands of the Germans, the bottle was accidentally thrown at the comrade and he died along with the German, whose skull was smashed with an axe a few seconds later.

The commander of the Gestapo squads in Treblinka, when he learnt of the fighting in the ghetto, arrived in Warsaw at the head of his band of murderers and immediately ordered to open machine-gun fire on the Jews, who were captured and taken to the Umschlagplatz. Almost all the Jews were killed in the square or in the carriages and never reached Treblinka. But the deportation had been stopped.

A great enthusiasm reigned in the ghetto. The bakers provided free bread to the warriors; others brought clothes, shoes and whatever they had. Everyone wanted to join the ranks of the Fighting Organisation, but there were no weapons. The booty was indeed large in comparison with all that had been purchased before - there were dozens of pistols and, most importantly, rifles. But it was barely enough for part of the squads which, for a long time, had already been training. One could not even dream of obtaining weapons for thousands of people - there were still several tens of thousands of Jews in the ghetto.

After the deportations ceased, no more Germans appeared in the ghetto. Silence reigned for about three months and the Fighting Organisation made good use of this respite, in its preparations for the final battle.