

Sara Edelist [née Gutgold]

History of the Underground Group “66”



The “66” Group was one of the first underground groups. Immediately upon the establishment of the “Small Ghetto” in Częstochowa, it began organising towards combating and defending against the Germans.

The group was made up mainly of young students between the ages of 16 of 21. This fact characterised it and set it apart from the city’s other underground groups. It was not affiliated with any party or movement, but recognised that war must be waged against the Germans. This made these boys and girls into a homogenised group.

The majority of the group’s members had already received a taste of underground activity in the “Big Ghetto”, during their studies in clandestine courses and their community operations for needy children. In was within the [framework] of these activities that most of the group’s members had met each other. Already then, these youths had felt that studies in clandestine courses and tutoring needy children also constituted underground operations against the Nazis and, when they organised in the “Small Ghetto” for an armed struggle, it was just a natural continuation of their activism in the “Big Ghetto”.

The group’s epithet originated in the address where several of its members - female members, to be precise, lived: ul. Nadrzeczna 66. This building was in the women’s section of the ghetto and, at first, the sisters Lusia and Sara Gutgold, Rysia Gutgeld, the sisters Dosia and Pola Szczekacz and Sabina Rypstajn lived there.

With the expansion of the ghetto, when youth groups came there, both from the “Big Ghetto” and other camps, and especially when the boys arrived - Mendel Fiszlewicz, Mietek Ferleger, Kuba Rypstajn, and Icek Windman - building No.66 became the centre of the group’s actual underground activity.

Mendel Fiszlewicz had arrived in the ghetto from the Treblinka death camp and, when he came to Nadrzeczna 66, he told the members of the group about all the horrors which he had witnessed in that camp, while the rest of the boys could already then speak of their contacts with other clandestine groups in the ghetto. Mendel’s tales of horror, together with the news which the other members of the group brought regarding the first blossoms of rebellion, reinforced the members of the group in their decision to organise for armed struggle. Thus, the sentiment was created that the group constituted one part of a large Jewish rebellion movement.

These were the members of the group:

- 1) Bencelowicz Pinek;
- 2) Gutgold Lusia;
- 3) Gutgold Sara (now Edelist);
- 4) Gutgeld Rysia;
- 5) Gerszonowicz Harry;
- 6) Hajman Hipek;

- 7) Hirsza Pola;
- 8) Wojdzisławski Heniek;
- 9) Wojdzisławska Lusia;
- 10) Wajntraub Mietek (Marduk);
- 11) Windman Icek (Lala);
- 12) Zborowska Fela;
- 13) Mass Jadzia;
- 14) Samsonowicz Pinek;
- 15) Feiner Izio (Faia);
- 16) Fiszlewicz Mendel;
- 17) Ferleger Mietek;
- 18) Frankenberg Lolek (Franczek);
- 19) Frankenberg Lucek;
- 20) Kopinski Władek;
- 21) Rozyner Awiw;
- 22) Rozencwajg Maniek;
- 23) Rozencwajg Marysia;
- 24) Rypsztajn Sabina;
- 25) Rypsztajn Kuba;
- 26) Szczekacz Dosia;
- 27) Szczekacz Pola.

The Struggle to Acquire Weapons - the First Casualties

The group's first operation began. It was concentrated towards acquiring weapons and searching for funds to put towards this end. All remaining family jewellery was sold and several of the group members were given the task to engage in smuggling, into the ghetto, food products from the city's "Aryan side" and to acquire the money necessary to buy arms. Members of the group did not eat their fill. They skimmed from their own mouths and saved penny by penny. The foodstuffs smuggled into the ghetto only passed through No.66 for sorting and selling. Only if they could not be sold, because they were spoilt or rotten, were they put to the group's use.

After great efforts, two pistols were purchased and smuggled into the ghetto. In order to buy them, Mietek Ferleger had gone all the way to the Kielce region, with the aid of a stranger named Szulman, who was an expert on the use of weapons and the methods of acquiring them.

The purchase of weapons not only involved obtaining funds and finding sources to acquire them from, but also transporting and smuggling them into the ghetto always entailed the dangers of their being discovered and of the transporters being captured. On one of Franczek's journeys, he was approached by a constable (*Bahnschutz*) [Railway Security], who asked him if he was not Jewish. "Come and see for yourself", Franczek replied nonchalantly. After some brief dealings, they both went to the toilet, where Franczek attacked the constable, strangled him and hurled him out the window into a field.

The second encounter with the Railway Security did not end in a similar fashion. At the end of December 1942, when Mietek Ferleger went outside the ghetto on matters of acquisition, he was again stopped by a *Bahnschutz* guard, who demanded he identify himself. Mietek leaped upon the policeman, tackled him to the ground and began to escape. But his luck betrayed him. He was caught and later murdered by the Germans. This first casualty was a severe blow for the group. It had not only lost a member admired by all, but also a capable leader, who encouraged his comrades and who managed the group's operations. In his place, Kuba Rypsztajn became leader of the group.

Contact with the Resistance and Preparations for Combat

The group was in close contact with the *kibbutz* at ul. Nadrzeczna 71, which unified the members of the underground from the Zionist movements and which, together with other clandestine groups, formed the ŻOB underground organisation in the ghetto. Mendel Fiszlewicz was the representative of "66" within the organisation's central command.

Feiner and Fiszlewicz's Attack

On 4th January 1943, the moment, which the members of the group had been waiting for, arrived. On this day, the Germans became aware that an underground organisation existed in the ghetto. Two members of the "66," Mendel Fiszlewicz and Izio Feiner (Faia), fell upon the Germans Roon and Soppart, who were in charge of organising the *akcja*. Mendel Fiszlewicz drew his pistol on Roon, but it malfunctioned. Izio Feiner fell upon Soppart with a knife.

Mendel Fiszlewicz fell at once, his body riddled with bullets, whereas Izio Feiner was injured and breathed his last after hours of torture. Izio did not even receive the "clemency" of an instant death, but died thus, suffering.

Following the demise of Mendel and Izio, the girls of the "66" were imprisoned, together with others, at the police station. The police station's two cells lacked any air and the shadow of death hovered in the gloom. The girls resolved they would not go to the railway carriages of their own free will and that they would attempt to escape at any cost.

On the evening of 5th January 1943, the detainees were taken out and led to the railway station. The signal to escape was given by Sara Gutgold, who managed to flee the station. She was followed by Jadzia Mass, but she slipped and was caught. The prisoners were transported to Radomsko, where the girls tried to bribe a Ukrainian policeman. But, after he had taken from them the few valuables they had left, he did not permit them to escape.

The girls began to lose hope of being able to escape, which only left them with a second course of action - to commit suicide. The first was Jadzia Mass, who hanged herself. She was to be followed by Marysia Rozencwajg – but, at the last moment, she was prevented from doing so by two lads, who opposed additional suicides by force and who concentrated all efforts towards escaping from the carriages.

The girls had managed to take tools with them aboard the carriages and once, they had succeeded in sawing through the carriage's bars, they jumped off, one after another, despite the opposition from the rest of the people aboard the carriage, who feared the Germans' response. Of all the girls who jumped from the carriage, Różka and Dosia Borkowski from the *kibbutz* made it back to Częstochowa. The girls from the "66" Group perished. We later heard that Lusja Gutgold, who was ill at the time, was injured when she jumped off the carriage and was no longer able to walk, whereupon Marysia Rozencwajg refused to leave her friend behind and they stayed together. This is what sealed their destiny. The leader of the village, in which they found themselves, handed them over to the Germans, who murdered them.

The Deaths of Hipek, Harry and Awiw

In April 1943 Hipek Hajman returned to the ghetto from Warsaw and was caught at the gate with a Polish identity card. He was arrested and imprisoned for the night in the Jewish police's gaol. That very night, members of the "66" Group organised a raid on the police station to free him. Kuba Rypstajm

and Marduk held the guards back at gunpoint, while Franczek, Harry and Awiw sawed through the bars and released Hipek. As soon as he was freed, he left the ghetto (over the fence) and travelled to Warsaw. For some time, he managed to roam about in the city without documents but, one day, he was stopped in the street, together with Lala by a *szmalcownik* (informer-blackmailer). Lala was able to flee, whereas Hipek was arrested and sent to the Trawinki [concentration] camp.

Shortly afterwards, a group of "66" members - Harry Gerszonowicz, Awiw Rozyner, and Franczek - took part in an act of sabotage on the railway tracks next to Błeszno (near Częstochowa), together with other members of the underground movement. Harry Gerszonowicz, after wounding a railway guard, and Awiw Rozyner were killed in this mission.

In that same period, Władek Kopinski was captured outside the ghetto and executed at the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery. One of the gendarmes recounted that, as he was being taken there with his hands tied, he fell upon the German who was escorting him, tackling him to the ground, but was unable to flee.

The Merging of the "66" with Other Underground Groups

The blows that had fallen upon the group caused its ranks to collapse. Therefore, the surviving members joined the other groups in the ghetto and the *kibbutz* in particular. The members participated both in the manufacture of arms and in the acquisition them. Marduk, Icek Windman (Lala) and Hipek, also, helped in buying weapons in Warsaw. Others took part in the digging of the underground passage leading outside the ghetto. Kuba Rypsztajn (the first of the Koniecpol fighters to be killed) and Pinek Bencelowicz joined the members of the Częstochowa underground groups which operated in the Koniecpol woods. Pinek Samsonowicz joined a unit of thirty combatants which went out to the Złoty Potok area, but the unit was captured and Pinek was killed during the exchange of fire with the Germans.

During the liquidation of the ghetto, a few passed through the underground passage ul. Garncarska 40. Among them were Dosia and Pola Szczekacz, Rysia Gutgeld, Franczek, Lala and Fela Zborowska. They reached the *Stary Rynek* [Old Market] and hid in an attic. Lala and Franczek were the first to leave. Lala was able to reach Koniecpol and, after a fortnight, he travelled with the Pole Krzaczek to Skarżysko to buy arms, from where he never returned. Franczek disappeared and nothing was known of his fate. After them, Lucek Frankenberg, Fela Zborowska and Bela Bram from the *kibbutz* descended from the attic and were able to make it to Koniecpol. Dosia and Pola Szczekacz and Rysia Gutgeld were already unable to leave in time, because the German gendarmerie had discovered them. But they had a grenade which they were able to throw at the gendarmes, wounding several. They themselves were all killed.

Of all the members of the "66," [only] Pinek Bencelowicz, Sara Gutgold, Heniek Wojdzistawski and Lolek Frankenberg survived. All the others fell at the hands of the German murderers.