

The Chronicle of the Koniecpol Unit

In the "Small Ghetto"

Following the *akcje* in the months November and December 1942, about 7,000 Jews remained in Częstochowa, crammed into six or seven narrow streets, in dilapidated houses and in inhumane living conditions. German gendarmerie forces, aided by Polish and Jewish constables, guarded the ghetto, which was encircled with barbed-wire fences.

Nevertheless, the remnants of the pioneering [Zionist] youth groups and the members of the training points *Dror* [Heb. for *Freiheit*], *Gordonia*, and *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* organised themselves even under these new conditions and lived in a communal house at ul. Garncarska 71, which the *Judenrat* and the ghetto's inhabitants called "the *kibbutz* on Garncarska".

Along similar lines as "the *kibbutz* on Garncarska", a group of youths with leftist and communist tendencies was organised and was known by its nickname "The 66 Group", after the house at ul. Nadrzeczna 66, where they lived.

Unlike in the "Big Ghetto", all arguments here, regarding whether the group should become a fighting organisation, ceased. The only question asked, was "How?". The primary members, who were concentrated inside the ghetto and who had founded the groups, pondered the question of how to put the idea of self-defence and overt struggle into practice under the new circumstances.

The operations committee sat for entire nights deliberating over how to acquire the preliminary funds and, above all, over how to obtain arms. After all, the members subsisted solely on the *Judenrat's* stipend, which was barely enough to live on. Notwithstanding this, the decision was made to embark on various fundraising operations and, by primitive means, we were able to attain the first sums.

An essential debate persisted around several, central issues - self-defence inside the ghetto, going out into the woods, information activities and sabotage on the "Aryan side".

After we had sent our first emissary from the ghetto to Warsaw, we were visited by Tosia Altman, Aryje Wilner (Jurek), Frumka Plotnicka, Chajka Fulman, Leizer Geler and other contacts also.

These comrades' visits helped us in no small measure to consolidate a stance, according to which it was agreed to act in two central directions:

- a) in active self-defence in the ghetto
- b) the organisation of partisan operations in the forests.

Likewise, it was decided to establish a connection point in the woods - a type of "bridge between Zagłębie and the General Government" (Częstochowa served as a connection point with the Zagłębie district, which was annexed to the Third Reich), mainly between the ghettos of Będzin and Sosnowiec. It was hoped that, once the battles in the Częstochowa ghetto were finished, the combatants who survived would be transferred to the connection point in the forest and, from there, to the ghettos that had not been yet liquidated, according to need.

In accordance with this decision, Mojtek Zilberberg, the commander of the organisation, went out to the Koniecpol area because, according to the information we had received, there were possibilities for setting up this kind of connection there. Indeed, Mojtek returned encouraged - a Polish peasant had been found, who would possibly be able to aid us in making our first contacts. Therefore, on that basis, it was resolved to establish the first points "outside", in order to attempt to create a chain of connections and to examine the potential of conducting partisan operations.

Going Out to the Koniecpol Region

Consequent upon Mojtek's visit, two members were sent to the Koniecpol region in January 1943 - Chaim (Maciek) Rozental, and myself. The instructions which we were given were very general. We were told that passing Koniecpol, towards Secemin, there began an area of dense woods spanning tens of kilometres. On the way to this forest, in an isolated house, lived a peasant - Mojtek's acquaintance.

The organisation had but one single pistol at its disposal, so we were obviously sent without weapons. Our appearance was not "Aryan". Both of us looked, as they said in the ghetto, "like three Jews". But, for the lack of any alternative, it was decided to take the risk. The particulars of the scheme were to go out with a group of labourers to the town of Mstów, to steal away from it there, make our way to the railway station, buy tickets and then travel to Koniecpol. From there, we were to proceed to the woods on foot.

After reaching Mstów safely, we stood in the queue to buy train tickets. A Pole suddenly approached us and kindly noted that it would be best to avoid a railway journey, as the Germans searched for Jews almost on a daily basis and that many had been caught.

We had no reason to mistrust this Pole's friendly warning, despite the fact that, in the ghetto, we had heard of many instances of Poles denouncing and turning Jews over to the Gestapo, not to mention extortion for money. We turned this way and that, fearing that someone had overheard our conversation with the Pole.

We headed to a secluded corner and deliberated on what we should do. Should we believe the Pole's advice or not. It was clear to us that taking the train was not an option.

The distance to Koniecpol was about sixty kilometres and we had a dilemma - we had no map, we did not know the way, we had neither money nor documents [and] perils lay in wait for us at every step of the way. And, above all, who could guarantee, even if we managed to overcome all the obstacles and make it to our destination, that the farmer would be at home? After all, he had not been given any previous notice [of our arrival].

Meanwhile, the cold outside tormented us bitterly, freezing every limb, burning and cutting into living flesh. And doubt gnawed at the heart, seeding unsureness. All our plans in the ghetto had not accounted for a contingency such as this. We wondered. Perhaps we should turn back? But no, if we perished, we perished³⁰! We continued walking on foot towards the forest.

As we did not know the side-tracks, we began marching along the main road, a certain distance from each other. We were stressed, the hunger started tormenting us [and] tiredness showed its signs - but there was no way out.

³⁰ [TN: Reference to Esther 4:16.]

Along the way, we met farmers' wives carrying heavy baskets with smuggled goods. Sometimes, we chatted with them about this and that. And here, in a conversation with one lady, she looked this way and that and whispered, "Why are you walking on the main road? This is extremely dangerous for you. The police and the German gendarmerie patrol the roads. They're always looking for people like you". The woman did not clarify as to whom she was referring, but showed us where the side-tracks were, by which it was possible to bypass villages and towns.

We took her advice and gave up on the highway for the lateral paths.

We proceeded laboriously. It seemed that only the importance of our mission had made us overcome the hunger and exhaustion. As we neared Koniecpol, we again opted for passing through the town, instead of making many inquiries about side-roads. With our heads held high, we walked along the main street, in full view of the German and Polish police.

All eyes seemed to be on us. They stabbed us with their glaring eyes, piercing through our emaciated bodies. From every side we heard, "Look how a dirty Jew insolently strolls about!".

Children played in gardens, people promenaded in the street to their enjoyment, the sellers, the marketplace - everything was as it had been yesterday and the day before yesterday - life flowed on as if nothing had happened.

As for us, we stared in amazement, as if we had arrived from another planet. A tremor seized us, lest someone should turn [to us] and ask the blood-chilling question, which would put an end to everything, "Hey, Jew! What are you doing here?".

So, we trudged on, with a fearful heart and faltering feet, until we reached the railway tracks. According to the explanations we had received, Koniecpol was already behind us, and only 7-8 kilometres remained to the village of Michałów - to the house of the peasant to which we were headed.

The longed-for woodland stretched along the sides of the road before us. The forest began to the right and, to the left, was an abundance of thick shrubs - everything was exactly as had been portrayed [to us] in the ghetto. Meanwhile, hunger tortured us and exhaustion, too, was manifest. It was difficult to move a limb. We lay down amongst the bushes, keeping our eyes on the road. If we did not persevere, we would remain there, frozen. So, we awoke, to push onwards. Suddenly, we spotted a black dot in the midst of the thickets. Our hearts beat excitedly - we had arrived! The forest was before us. The dot became increasingly larger - an isolated farmhouse. With bated breath, we passed by it. A dog barked. Everything indicated that the owners were home, but we dared not go inside. It was better to be cautious and to wait until darkness fell. In the meantime, we left the road and entered the woods. Some moments later, a whistle was heard. Someone was coming. Again, caution compelled us to ignore this and to continue walking onwards. But here a farmer approached us and, with a contained smile, said to us, "Lads, don't be afraid. Nothing bad will happen to you. It's good that you were careful and left the road. Wait for me here and, after dark, I'll come and take you to my house".

When darkness had fallen, we again heard footsteps approaching.

At Farmer Roman's House

At the farmer's house, an extraordinary feeling pervaded us - homely warmth, children and laughter. [But] there was no time for reflection - the household members were already tending to our needs and serving us hot drinks. Our host introduced himself and his family - Roman Pindelak, his wife Polcia

[Paulina], his sister Helcia [Helena] and the children. After we had dined to our heart's content, he took us to the adjacent cowshed, our sleeping quarters. We were very excited - this was our first night sleeping outside the ghetto.

Shortly before sunrise, Helcia came to milk the cows. She greeted us warmly and explained that we would have to stay inside the barn during the entire day but that, for supper, we would be able to come inside the house and then we would talk about everything. Helcia and Polcia brought us breakfast. We racked our brains deliberating as to whether to reveal to the farmer the plans for creating the organisation, its goals, its missions [and] our aspirations for partisan operations. As the hours passed, our opinions changed back and forth. Our thoughts were inadvertently drawn to the ghetto. With the Germans, you never knew what to expect tomorrow. On 4th January, everyone had gone out to work. Nothing had felt different. All of a sudden, at eight o'clock, S.S. reinforcements surrounded the ghetto and an "*akcja*" was declared.

While we were still immersed in our reverie, the door was cautiously opened - 20-22-year-old Helcia brought us lunch. Her features conveyed a gentle, female tenderness. She was mindful of her words in order not to offend us, Heaven forbid, and asked us to speak in whispers, hinting all the while at her brother Roman's connections.

We pondered about our host, weighing and comparing, and our hearts told us we were in good hands. The day drew to an end and Helcia invited us in for supper.

Roman, the head of the household, endeavoured to treat us with particular warmth. He told us about the area that we were in, of the isolated house's advantageous location, as it was half a kilometre from the [nearest] neighbour, and cautioned us regarding the neighbours, who sometimes passed by the cowshed. Several Jews were hiding out in the surrounding area. He hinted that the partisans were in the vicinity. He spoke of his two brothers - one who was imprisoned in gaol and the other who lived next to Secemin. He spoke about Mojtek at length. Roman knew that we were not lone individuals, private persons, but that we belonged to a larger family - to a group. But he did not wish to go into details. From his words, it was clear that he understood our insinuations perfectly well, but he always tried to change the subject. A few peaceful days transpired. The wounds on our feet began to heal. We attempted to broach the subject of our coming with Roman, but he did not wish to do so. The quietness started tormenting us. It lay heavy on the heart. The thought gnawed at us - what now?

We plotted schemes. We desired to become familiar with the terrain, to learn, to see, to plan something. The first thing that came to mind - the telephone! This really stood out. [We should] sabotage the telephone wires!

Without Roman's knowledge, in the dead of night, we emerged from our hideout in the cowshed to explore the surrounding area. But, as it turned out, without Roman, we could do nothing. The dog was a problem for us at night. He would notice us at once and bark relentlessly. Roman would naturally get up and go straight to the cowshed - and not find us there. We tried this several times and reached the conclusion that, under these conditions, we could not succeed. Roman repeatedly asked us why we were leaving. The question was embarrassing, but we found an excuse - "After staying in the cowshed, we need fresh air, a walk in the forest." But Roman did not accept our explanations and insisted that we cease these promenades.

Meanwhile, an emissary arrived from the ghetto with money in his satchel. He brought Roman greetings from Mojtek and explicitly instructed us to persevere, together with information that other comrades would soon arrive. The news of the happenings in the ghetto and in the Fighting Organisation was encouraging. The organisation was enlarging its ranks. Audacious schemes were

being plotted to defend the ghetto. A workshop for the manufacture of hand-grenades had been set up. Successful fundraising operations were being carried out [and] tunnels out of the ghetto were being dug. Contact was being maintained with Warsaw, Sosnowiec, and Będzin. Many hopes were pinned on the contact point at Roman's. The messenger then left and, with him, left our good spirits, which waned as time went by without news.

Again, days of inactivity. We received no further news from the ghetto. We decided to send a comrade to the ghetto, for guidance, and to speak more clearly with Roman regarding the future. He personally fully understood our edginess for lack of action. One evening, in a conversation with him, we told him of our desire to make the acquaintance of the local partisans and of the [proposed] visit to the ghetto. Roman showed great understanding. That evening, he was in an elated mood. He had drunk more than usual. "I know perfectly well", he said, "that you are not private people. You are Jews, not from this region". But he advised us to be patient, not to make any rash moves. He also knew what we were going out for at night. But different people passed by his house. He was in contact with various circles. He again voiced the hope which he was pinning on two Jews, of whose [imminent] arrival he had told us quite a while back. Nevertheless, he was not opposed to our sending one comrade to the ghetto for advice. Being the case, the emissaries³¹ set out.

The way back to the ghetto was already familiar and so self-confidence increased. Above all, it [strengthened] our faith in the honesty of the Pindelak household. The journey indeed transpired safely and the entry into the ghetto was successful.

The comrades in the ghetto were surprised, but they well understood our feelings. It was easier than sitting in the farmer's house doing nothing. In a meeting at the organisation's headquarters, the situation in the ghetto was described at length, as was also explained the importance of the connection point at Pindelak's. Over time, the organisation's scope had grown. Every night, units set out on different operations. There was an atmosphere of activity and the members were right to be proud of their achievements. They told about the successful testing of the home-made grenades [and that] the fighters went about outside unmolested, despite the strict curfew.

As for the Koniecpol point, Mojtek promised that reinforcements would soon arrive and that things would change. Still, no one knows what tomorrow may bring. The way back [to Koniecpol] would not be particularly difficult now, knowing that they were expecting us there.

The Pindelak received us well, as one of their own. They asked how our friends were, how Mojtek was doing and what was happening in the ghetto.

New Friends – Chaim and Szmul

One stormy night, we awoke to the barking of the dog, our trusty guardian, which was immediately followed by stealthy footsteps and a rapping on Roman's window. The door opened and the people entered. They stayed inside the house a long while and then Roman's footsteps approached us. He cautiously opened the door and reassured us, "Don't be afraid - the two local Jewish residents I told you about have arrived. You should meet them - don't be afraid of them. They are good people. I've known them for a long time".

When we went inside the house, we found the guests in animated conversation with Helcia and Polcia. They were both strong and tall and seemed to have a good disposition. Our joy knew no bounds. While we still stared at them in amazement, Chaim and Szmul told us of their standing in the area. They

³¹ [TN: It is not clear from the original how many people were sent and who they were, but obviously the author himself was one of them.]to have

knew every bit of the terrain there, every tree in the forest. When the ghetto had been established, they had not gone inside it, but had hidden, all the time, with peasants. They had many trustworthy friends and, from time to time, they went on different visits. They praised the Pindelak family extensively - that we were very fortunate to have found them. We told them who we were and revealed that we had not come to hide, but had plans for the future, [and that] we were part of a greater family, which belonged to a fighting organisation, whose main task was engaging in battle with the enemy. [Even] in the dark, you could feel the effect of our words. They radiated with joy. Finally, they were no longer alone. They, too, had heard of the partisans in the vicinity and promised to do everything to put us in contact with them. After 24 hours, we parted company with them in the dark as with old friends.

Then another unbearable period of waiting was forced upon us. Time passed and no news came from the ghetto. We decided to set out once more, to report the situation and, above all, to find out what was happening with our comrades.

Upon our arrival in the ghetto, we felt the great anticipation. Everyone was ready for the zero hour. The tunnels were done. The grenade industry was operating at full steam. And, again, we were promised, at the headquarters' meetings, that reinforcements would definitely come. They told us of plans to establish yet another contact point in Złoty Potok - and so we headed back.

Our life at Roman Pindelak's continued as usual, except that, from time to time, Roman came in agitated and, without too many explanations, ordered us, "Lads, out! No time to explain - get up, we have to go!". We would then scramble to the woods, which were several kilometres away. One time, Roman showed us a safe place there under a tree, the branches of which formed a roof over an area several metres around. The tips of its branches were bent down under the weight of its vegetation and, once you were able to penetrate beneath its thick canopy, you found yourself inside a sort of branch-thatched dome and you could comfortably sit inside without being seen from the outside. The tree stood by the path traversing the forest and, from it, one could observe those coming and going. The new friends, Chaim and Szmul, continued coming to visit. In our first meetings, they were not overly eager to relinquish their passive way of life, but they underwent a change and began showing readiness to pass on to a more active life. They hinted at a peasants' house several kilometres away, which one could turn to in times of need.

"Reinforcements" From the Ghetto

At the beginning of March 1943, we were again awoken one night by the loyal dog's barks. People were approaching and, as always, we wondered who they could be. We heard rapping on Roman's window and, after a few sentences were exchanged, Helcia came and announced joyously that the reinforcements had arrived. We were invited to enter the house at once and the happiness was great. Leon Szydlowski, Zygmunt Gliksman, Jacek Bencelowicz, Kuba, and Aron Szwarc had arrived.

As if reading our minds, our host exclaimed loudly, "Now, you'll all stay in the forest. Wait until Chaim and Szmul arrive and, together, you'll plan your course of action".

Roman knew the vicinity very well, noticing the movements of any stranger and, in his opinion, the time to act had come.

We honoured the occasion by drinking the traditional un-distilled³² 95% spirit. The atmosphere was elated. As morning drew near, Roman said, "Now, you must all go to the woods. Wait there for Chaim

³² [TN: The author probably meant to say that it was drunk pure (as was in fact the custom in Poland), and not watered down, as the strength forcibly implies distillation.]

and Szmul, under the tree which you know. You must exercise caution. Food and drink, we will provide. At night, if everything's quiet, you may come and be my guests here, to bathe and warm yourselves".

We set out towards the woods in high spirits, accompanied by Roman. The tree did not let us down. It took us all in under its protection and we remained there, as Roman had instructed us. In a state of excitement, each of us settled down as well as he could and then we slept for what was left of the night, having stationed a watch around us.

The day passed by without any particular contretemps. The feeling under the tree was wonderful. Sometimes, we drifted away in our imagination to boyhood fairy-tales of being invisible. You could see people passing by on the forest paths, but you were hidden from their sight.

We endeavoured to exercise caution, talking in whispers, but our emotions got the best of us and, in the evening, following an animated conversation about our situation and the events in the ghetto, we burst into song - songs of yearning for the past. We had been sent back, as it were, to peacetime and youthful dreams - as if we were spending an evening together in the youth groups and dreaming here, with open eyes. One friend's reminder to not forget our situation - brought us back to the bitter reality, to [sic] our world of yesterday, which had been destroyed. After all, it was only by chance that we were still alive.

Days of expectation passed, towards the meeting with Chaim and Szmul. Roman and Helcia, as well as his [other] family members, endeavoured to make our stay in the forest pleasurable.

Indeed, Chaim and Szmul did not disappoint us. After a few days, they appeared. Very impressed with the backup that had arrived from the ghetto and with our fierce determination to initiate operations against the Germans, they resolved to remain with us.

Our plan for the future followed the guidelines that had been set in the ghetto:

- a) Active engagement
- b) Widen connections with the local peasants - to prepare locations for the days to come, as events in the ghetto would dictate.

The Hajdas Family

We [then] moved to the house of the Hajdas family, who lived a few kilometres from our point in the woods.

Their house was not as favourably positioned as that of Roman Pindelak. It was at the start of the village and, there, one needed to be twice as cautious. The "government" here was in the hands of the lady of the house, energetic, humorous and oozing kindness. We call her "Mama" Hajdas. Indeed, she tended to every little detail, treating Chaim and Szmul as her own children. Here, too, we live in a barn. The children are small, but their parents consider them bright and [they are] eager to help us. One adult son is married and lives apart from his parents. Their daughter had been sent to forced labour in Germany and was about to return. [They were] typical peasants - simple and kind-hearted people, who tend to befriend anyone who means them well. It is therefore no wonder that, already in the first days, we developed a strong relationship with them, as if we were one family.

We embarked on some vigorous activity. Every night, we went out to scout the vicinity. Until after running about on the roads nightly, Chaim and Szmul located other "fat" spots with the family of Jan Czapla, who treated our friends warmheartedly and sympathetically.

One night, we were terribly shaken, when Szmul, Kuba and Jacek went out on a routine patrol and a shout suddenly pierced the air, "Halt!", immediately followed by another yell "Who are you?!". When they answered, "Partisans", gunfire rang out. Szmul was hit and killed on the spot. It is hard to describe our sorrow and despondency and, particularly, Chaim's sadness. Both of them had hidden out all those years. They had walked that road together. How we had yearned to meet the Polish partisans. We had pinned so many hopes on them - and here, an abominable murder on their part. There was no doubt they had identified us as Jews. This new reality dictated more caution in making contacts and in chance encounters.

Roman's house, as usual, was always open. We received news of local events. Several other members arrived from the ghetto and the first stop, of course, was at Roman's, who received them warmly. The new arrivals gave us news of the ghetto. The tunnels had been completed, the number of combatants in the organisation had grown, intensive activity was underway, weapons were being acquired, grenade manufacture was going at full steam, several collaborators had been eliminated and the connections with Warsaw and Zagłębie were becoming tighter. In Warsaw, too, they had received, with some gratification, the news that the Konięcpol point had been established.

Conditions in the Hajdas household were satisfying. Our mutual relationship had become very close. Meanwhile, the daughter Tolka had returned from Germany. It is true, that in the first few days following her arrival, there was some tension. She did not know us but, after several days, the situation changed and Tolka became our close friend. Like her mother, she had the ability of instilling the spirit of life and encouragement in us. With Janek, too, we had an excellent relationship. Contact between the points was maintained. Chaim was in the movement with our members. He regularly endeavoured to broaden the contacts and to get in touch with the partisans. The region was teeming with partisans who were affiliated with the *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* [National Armed Forces], the extremist right-wing party that was antisemitic at its core, as well as groups of the *Armia Krajowa* [Home Army], in which there were many Jew-hating circles. The *Bataliony Chłopskie* [Peasants' Battalions; leftist partisans] groups were few.

After a few days, our comrades, the combatants, appeared - the first of the survivors. Their appearance attested to the nightmare which they had lived through in those days and they told the horrendous story of the liquidation of the ŻOB - followed by that of the "Small Ghetto". They were surprised by Roman and his family's warm welcome and the meeting with our friends. After somewhat recovering, they began telling us what had happened to them in those days³³.

The Surviving Fighters from the Ghetto

One evening in July 1943, we tapped - as usual - on Roman's window. But this time, unlike always, the door was opened abruptly and we saw that Roman and Helcia were very agitated. At first, they wanted to say nothing but, after we pleaded with them, Roman blurted out this horrifying statement, "You poor people! The ghetto is no more!". As he said this, he pulled out a newspaper and showed us the reports on the liquidation of the Częstochowa ghetto and the massacre which had preceded it.

Roman suggested that we not spend the night at his house. It was better to wait in the wood and be prepared for events to come. He was well aware that his address was known inside the ghetto, which placed him in serious peril. But he did not lose his head. Instead, he composedly calmed us. We went out to our trusty tree. Nervously, we waited for news from the ghetto and for our comrades who had managed to escape the fighting, who, as previously agreed, were to come to us. We apprehensively asked ourselves whether our friends had been able to deploy the many weapons they had

³³ [TN: This paragraph is repeated verbatim on the following page (col.250); obviously its proper place is there, and it was mistakenly printed here as well.]

accumulated at such great risk. We had been so proud of the grenade production - it was, after all, not just a defence weapon, but an assault one as well. And our comrades, the combatants - who among them had survived? And had the tunnels served their purpose?

Should we perhaps set out to meet them? Maybe they had lost their way? But logic compelled us to dismiss emotional suggestions. We knew that the commanders of the units, as well as the majority of the fighters, knew Roman's address and we could not jeopardise his home. How difficult the hours of waiting are! We were only about sixty kilometres away from the ghetto, but it was impossible to receive any accurate information. Roman and Helcia gave us horrifying details on the continuation of the bombardment in the ghetto. We asked about the battles, but they had no answer to this. We were in a state of shock.

Until now, we had felt a part of a large and organised body. We had awaited the fulfilment of the dream - an uprising in the ghetto - and, now, the disappointment was so bitter. Could everything have come to an end?

The stress and anxiety increased. The slightest noise awakened hope. Had someone arrived from the ghetto? But we were bitterly disappointed. Roman and Helcia reassured and comforted us, "Be patient, they will surely come".

"You told us about tunnels", Roman said. "The comrades must be inside them. They are forced to wait several days, until the vigilance over those exiting weakens a bit".

Our thoughts were focused solely on life in the ghetto and comrades tell of the organisation's different operations. When the organisation had been first founded, an event took place which taught the Jewish police a lesson. Hipek, a member of the organisation, had returned from a mission to Warsaw, bringing various certificates with him. Upon entering the ghetto, he was apprehended by the German gendarmerie, who turned him over to the Jewish police to be guarded overnight. In the morning, they were required to bring him over to the Gestapo. When this became known to the members, they decided to break him out by force. The decision was made only after much deliberation, but once it had been made, a group of fighters came to the Jewish police-station. The officers were surprised to see them, with their seemingly "odd" comportment. At first, they mocked them, but when the order was given, "Faces to the wall, with your hands up!", accompanied by threats with a pistol to boot (the only one the organisation had at its disposal at the time), they panicked and obeyed. They were ordered to, at once, break open the cellar door and free Hipek. He was released and was immediately taken outside the ghetto. They cautioned the police to never hold another fighter in custody.

Story followed story. One member recalled the "Ostbahn" operations - the plan to sabotage the train which was taking equipment, munitions and troops to the front. The operation had been preceded by reconnaissance and studying the timetables of the trains passing through our city. The organisation had no explosives in its possession at the time. So, it was therefore decided to carry out the operation using suitable wrenches, which had been fashioned in different workshops.

On the day set for the operation, the fighters went out equipped with personal weapons - pistols and the wrenches - to the "Ostbahn" workplace. On the way there, they snuck off to the previously appointed location. Unfortunately, the Poles recognised them as Jews and informed the police, who hurried and soon arrived there. An exchange of gunfire immediately ensued. Our comrades fought back, until they ran out of bullets. Three members were killed. One managed to evade [them] and flee back to the ghetto, whilst the group's commander, Zvi [Hersz] Lustiger, was wounded and caught. He was taken to the Gestapo, sent to the hospital and, once he had recovered, was brought back to the Gestapo for questioning. Zvi was cruelly tortured. They demanded that he reveal who his friends were

and who had sent him. Jews, who worked at the Gestapo, recounted that he had been literally cut to pieces, but he had withstood with sublime fortitude and did not say one word about his comrades - the fighters. In reprisal, the Germans executed 24 Jews who worked at "Ostbahn".

We put the nights to good use by searching for new places for our friends, who were to arrive from the ghetto. We obtained promises from several farmers and waited, in readiness, for their arrival.

After a few days, our comrades, the combatants, appeared - the first of the survivors. Their appearance attested to the nightmare through which they had lived in those days and they told the horrendous story of the liquidation of the ŻOB - followed by that of the "Small Ghetto". They were surprised by Roman and his family's warm welcome and the meeting with our friends. After recovering somewhat, they began telling us of what had happened to them in those days.

Josek [sic; Lutek] Gliksztajn, who was with Mojtek, the organisation's commander, to the very last moment in the leadership's central bunker, where the armaments were concentrated, could only give scanty details. In the days preceding the organisation's elimination, a certain tension was felt in the ghetto. The fighters were mustered to their positions, ready and willing to receive the Germans inside the ghetto, and to engage them in battle face to face.

After twenty-four relatively peaceful hours, the order was issued to disperse [and] to return to everyday life. The following day, some of the combatants went out to [their] workplaces.

It was not long before the surprise came. On 25th June 1943, the Germans surrounded the ghetto with increased forces. [They] immediately approached the building at ul. Nadrzeczna 88 and took the residents out of their homes. They knew exactly where the bunker was located and made Zalman Woltman open its entrance. They dared not approach it themselves, but first hurled in several grenades. Zalman descended [into it] first and they followed him. They found Mojtek dead. In the crucial moments, Mojtek (with a high fever) with Lutek next to him, were in the bunker. Mojtek ordered Lutek to exit the bunker via the tunnel, to the "Aryan side". He himself committed suicide, with the dose of poison which he always carried with him.

[Now] Dawid [?] spoke and the tension he had been through those past few days was still apparent in his features. In his opinion, the organisation had only been eliminated due to having been informed upon. The Germans were equipped with detailed blueprints. They knew exactly where the cache of weapons was, where the fighters met [and knew of] the tunnels - and they acted in accordance to this. They did not touch the ghetto, before they had completely eliminated the bunkers and the groups of combatants.

As for himself, he could not understand how he had been able to make the journey from Częstochowa to us without being caught. Upon leaving the bunker, he had not noticed at all that there was a patch with a Star of David on his coat and only before Koniecpol was this pointed out to him by a Pole who chanced on his way.

Members tell of a shootout in Rywka Glanc's group. Rywka had come to our city as an instructor for the "Dror" ["Freiheit"] group. She had "Aryan" features and fair hair. This enabled her to move about more freely on the "Aryan side". In the "Big Ghetto", Rywka stood out with her leather coat, which was the typical pioneering garb, and she was a renowned figure among the Jewish youth. She always encouraged, called to action, was prepared to offer assistance [and] stood at the head of all delegations which bargained with the *Judenrat*. In the "Small Ghetto", she stood at the centre of things at the *kibbutz* at ul. Nadrzeczna 71. She was lively and actively involved in all areas of life. In the ŻOB, she was always in the first line of operations, a principal and regular contact person, who brought

weapons from Warsaw to the ghetto. To the entreaties of the institutions which tried to convince her to get out of the ghetto, she had an unwavering response, "As long as there are Jews in Częstochowa and in the ghetto, I am with them".

The comrades also spoke of the tragic liquidation of our partisan group in the Złoty Potok woods. The organisation's headquarters had contacted the Polish Socialist Party leadership in our city. They were entrusted with a significant sum for the purchase of weapons and it had been settled that about forty fighters would receive basic training, in order to be incorporated into the existing units.

On the pre-arranged date, the members left the ghetto, equipped with home-made grenades and several handguns. As a result of being informed upon, a catastrophe took place. Our comrades were murdered.

Józek Winter contacted the HASAG factory's driver, who promised to drive our comrades to the Złoty Potok forest. On the appointed day, the group left, under command of Harry Potaszewicz. But, during the ride, they noticed they were being taken in the opposite direction. Having no other choice, they began jumping off the car, not knowing that Gestapo men were travelling behind them. An exchange of fire ensued and all were killed, apart from Harry, who was taken to the Gestapo and heavily tortured. They demanded that he reveal the names of the rest of the organisation's members remaining in the ghetto. But they were unable to get one word from him. They arranged a general line-up, and sat Harry by the window of the Jewish police-post, with Gestapo men next to him. The ghetto residents were made to pass by in single file, but Harry did not point out anyone. After much torture, he was executed.

Meanwhile, in the Złoty Potok forest, they waited five days in vain for the instructors, who were to come and train them and to transfer them into the ranks of the partisans. In their place, they hired a Pole of dubious past and odd in his ways, who would occasionally disappear with unreasonable pretexts. His conduct aroused suspicions and, after an investigation, they were forced to sack him. The results did not take long in coming - the rumour was spread in the vicinity that a group of armed Jews was at large. This information reached the Polish police, who brought it to the Germans. One day, our members were surrounded by significant forces of Germans and Polish policemen. A clash ensued and the majority of our comrades were killed on the spot. Only a few managed to breach the ring of attackers. Among these were Romek and his sister, Bernard Chrapot, Jakobson [and] Abram Woznica, who returned to the labour camp.

People continued arriving from the ghetto - Juda Gliksztajn, Bela Bram [and] Fela Zborowska. The last to arrive was Lala Windman. His outward appearance had enabled him to move about among the Poles outside the ghetto and to hear how the Poles and the peasants praised the Germans for having exterminated the Jews. Lala also managed to bring us a substantial amount of money from the organisation's treasury in the ghetto.

These tidings instilled an abysmal depression in us. Then, Roman appeared with a representative of the Polish Resistance, the P.P.R. - Krzaczek from Warsaw. Comrades knew him from his visits to the ghetto. We had heard plenty about his deeds during the days of the uprising in Warsaw, especially of the assistance he had given in taking the combatants out from the trenches. He showed a willingness to come to our aid - he knew about the money that the remaining fighters had brought from the ghetto. He gave us several suggestions, among them, a magical proposition regarding the purchase of weaponry. He said that he had excellent contacts inside an arms factory, which produced rifles, pistols, etc. He even expressed a preparedness to travel to arrange the matter and demanded that Lala accompany him. Without hesitation or doubts, we put the money we had in our possession in his

hands, for it never crossed our minds to doubt his trustworthiness, and they set out on their mission. To our sorrow, this time too, we were bitterly disappointed.

Days and nights, we awaited their return. We never saw dear Lala again. Krzaczek also disappeared. Eventually, the riddle was solved. In one of the groves near Radom, Krzaczek had murdered Lala and took the money and valuables, which had been allocated towards the purchase of arms.

Thus, our dear Lala ended his life - the young lad, who was the first to embark on dangerous missions, the main contact person between the ghetto and Warsaw. He paid no heed to our warnings and was always prepared for any operation.

Our situation was not brilliant. We were forced to seek several, safe hubs with farmers. We met almost every night under our famous tree, holding deliberations on how we could go out into the open. We knew that the ghetto had been liquidated and that the remaining Jews had been put into the camps at HASAG and into the Raków factory. The desire to engage in active warfare increased.

Stach [Stanisław] Hanyż

One night, Chaim returned and told us about an acquaintance of his, Stach Hanyż, who was hiding his [female] cousin. Stach was known in the region as a serious man, with a rich past of political, communist activism. We decided to contact him and, after several nights of searching, Chaim was able to arrange a meeting between us. At first, we could barely see his face, which he tried to hide, in keeping with the rules of the underground. He asked numerous questions about our past, our operations in the ghetto, our contacts with Warsaw, about organisations, [political] parties, etc. We told him in detail about the ŻOB, the disappointments in the ghetto and of our fierce desire to continue the struggle. He listened to us attentively and promised that he would contact us in a few days to give us an answer. Once more, a spark of hope was ignited in us that, perhaps, we would be able to come out of our isolation. After some time, Stach did, in fact, return with an affirmative answer. He agreed to instruct and to lead the group.

The Koniecpol district, just like the Kielce area in eastern Poland, was permeated with hatred towards Jews. As a local, Stach was well familiar with the Poles' antisemitic sentiments in general and those of the inhabitants of this region, in particular. Already, in our first meetings, he tried to explain to us that we would need to exercise extreme caution. We were not to be recognised as Jews. Without the support of the locals, we would not survive long, because partisan activity is impossible without a sympathetic population. Stach made a plan of action. He suggested that we start, for the moment, with the purchase of weapons and food. As a native of the region, he was familiar with the residents and knew the exact sources. Through his conduct, he gave us self-confidence and he even taught us how to extract concealed weapons from the peasants. The state of affairs became such that each one of us was armed and we now wished to widen the group's framework.

The connections with Roman and the comrades at other points were very tight. A delegation from the HASAG and Raków camps also came. They informed us of the existence and reorganising of the remaining members of the organisation and desired to know how things were with us. We were glad for the new contacts, particularly in view of the latest developments with us in Koniecpol. We felt that we had finally, somehow, come out from our "splendid isolation"³⁴.

One night, Stach proposed that we admit two Poles into our group. The main reasons he gave were that they were from the near vicinity and knew the terrain very well, and they could therefore be of

³⁴ [TN: Term used for the 19th-century British diplomatic practice of avoiding permanent alliances.]

great assistance to us. We accepted his suggestion, but the two characters who arrived seemed a trifle odd to us. Their motives for joining were not political, but criminal. After having committed a robbery, they needed to hide from the authorities. Notwithstanding, they fell in with the disciple whom reality had cast upon them. Stach's words, to the effect that these people would prove useful to us, were validated. From them, we learned how to "obtain" what we needed from farmers' houses and so on.

Later, Stach suggested that we admit to the group two Russians who had managed to escape captivity. We couldn't speak much with the Russians, because our Russian was not very good, but we understood each other. After some time, and following several successful operations, Stach presented a short-term and long-term plan of action. Short-term, operations could not be conducted in the wintertime, due to the tracks [that would be left] in the snow. It was, therefore, necessary to construct an appropriate bunker and to stock up on food for the winter months. As for the longer-term plans, he hinted at the contacts he had with different partisan units in more remote areas and outlined to us plans for sabotage operations and fighting the enemy.

Stach appointed a location for the bunker and also arranged for the provision of proper timbers. The bunker was set up in the Włoszczowa-Starzyny³⁵ area, in a forest, which could be accessed [only] by a river. In these circumstances, we felt as if on a desert island.

Inside this well-camouflaged bunker, there were living quarters, [stores] of weapons, provisions, etc. The forester lived next to the bunker. He was aware of our presence. Chaim's [female] cousin was also hiding in his house.

Life went on according to plan - operations were conducted against peasants who collaborated with the Germans, armaments were acquired and provisions were stored. Stach spent a great deal of time with us. He sometimes brought the illegal press, in which we found news of world events. He spoke extensively about politics, always justifying the Soviet Union's stance. Among other things, he told of leftist groups organising in the region, which were inactive for the time being, due to the character of the region, being mostly reactionary. Groups of A.K. and N.S.Z. [*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*; National Armed Forces] were active in the region, while the organised comrades were sitting at home, waiting for a sign.

His standpoint regarding the Jews jarred on our ears. He argued, again and again, that he could not understand how the Jews could go, just like that, to the slaughter. He could not imagine, he said, that the Poles would go in such a manner.

We explained to him the special situation in which we were placed, the steps the Germans had taken - at first humiliation, followed by cunningly, fomenting illusions [and] establishing ghettos, with all that this entailed. But, despite all this, the uprising had broken out in Warsaw [and] the brilliant organisation had operated in our city which, only due to denunciation, was unable to engage in open combat. We pointed out the hundreds of thousands of Russians who went into captivity without resisting, the transports of thousands of Poles to the camps, etc. But, in this matter, we could not see eye to eye.

Meanwhile, we were joined by several comrades who had come from Raków and other points. The comrades coming from the camps were surprised to see, before them, a truly independent partisan unit.

³⁵ [TN: This is a rather large general area, as the two towns are almost 24 km apart.]

“Operation of the Bulls”

One evening, Stach came and told us that the Germans were rounding up a large herd of bulls to take to Germany for breeding and that they were 15 km away. He proposed that we eliminate the herd, serving a twofold purpose - firstly, to thwart the plan for the bulls being taken to Germany and, secondly, to stockpile food for the impending winter. Before long, we put this plan into practice. The comrades went out on this mission with high spirits. First, we scouted the terrain and, then, we stationed guards around the village. The work was conducted energetically, everything was done quickly. We even had wagons ready, in which to take the meat back to our base.

But just as we began to load the meat onto the wagons, a great disaster occurred. Polish partisans, who apparently had planned a similar operation, ran into our guards when they entered the village. They asked our sentry who he was, to which he replied, “One of ours”. This was Aron, who did not speak Polish well and they understood, at once, with whom they were dealing. They dragged him to the spot where the operation was taking place and surrounded the building. An order was given: “Stand – hands up!”. Our men were not able to grab their weapons in time and they were forced to surrender. One member tried explaining who we were, but it was all to no avail. Except for the two Poles who were with us, they made everyone, including one of the Russians, stand against the wall and a volley of shots rained on them. The Poles, however, were not satisfied just with these victims. They went out on thorough searches, and it was a miracle that our comrade who was in charge of the wagons, upon hearing a succession of shots from the village, began deliberating with the man who was stationed to guard the other end of the village and, when they saw a group of 15-20 armed men in Polish military uniforms, they grasped the situation. They hid until the group had passed by and then decided to leave that spot quickly and to inform Stach and the rest of the comrades at the bunker.

After a brief parley, they made the decision to leave Michał in the bunker, whilst Lucek³⁶ the Russian, Zygmunt, and Jacek hurried to the scene of the event. We³⁷ entered the first house we came upon, brought the peasant out from his room and demanded of him that he tell us the meaning of the shooting in the village. The peasant, startled and scared, began stuttering. At first, he did not understand whether we belonged to the first group or to the second. Then he told.

Upon nearing the scene of the incident, we heard voices and noise - wagons [were] approaching. We were sure it was the partisans. We assumed a comfortable position and cocked our guns. There was no doubt in our hearts as to how we should act. We knew we had to shoot. The moment had come to avenge the blood of our comrades, who had been murdered only because they were Jews.

The wagons drew nearer. We let loose with our weapons and the echoes of the shots pierced the air. We waited for the return fire, but there was none. We waited a little and then went to investigate what had happened. Then the mystery was solved - in front of us were empty wagons. We checked them and found nothing. We realised that, in keeping with the custom of the partisans, once the operation had been concluded, they had returned the wagons.

We approached the scene of the event and saw peasants running away, having heard our shots. They were convinced that a group of partisans were coming again, who did not know who they were. We found a pile of corpses there.

The first light of dawn was nearing and we still needed to take the bodies and warn our comrades back at our base in the morning. With trembling hands, we started to move the bodies. Suddenly, we heard

³⁶ [TN: It is not clear whether Lucek was the Russian, or if they are two separate individuals, and a comma should be put between them.]

³⁷ [TN: From this line, it would appear the author was also in this group.]

a groan from within the pile, followed by a weak voice, "It's me, Leon". We lay him aside, covered in clotted blood. We checked the others. Unfortunately, there were no other miracles. They were all dead.

We were faced with a grave moral dilemma - what to do? We had come to retrieve the dead but, first, we needed to save the wounded man and leave the scene with him. Any instant surprises might arise. We ordered the farmer to bring a comfortable wagon to lay in and, galloping wildly, we transported the injured Leon, who was writhing with pain. [By then,] it had dawned and already broken and we were worried as to whether we would be able to take our comrades out from the bunker in time or not. We were sure that the Poles, taken captive by the partisans, would lead them there. We arrived at the bunker, took the members and the remaining weapons out of it, and hastened to get away. We could no longer use the wagon, as it was already light. So, the escape would need to be on foot. Lucek was able to travel off with the wagon and abandon it in a field, after which he re-joined us. We were looking for a refuge until evening, when we came upon a farmhouse, with a barn next to it. We entered it, without letting the owner know anything. Informing no one, we lay the injured Leon down, fed him with the food which we had brought from the bunker and waited by the barn door with our weapons cocked.

We knew the partisans would not be satisfied with what had been done - they would make use of the Poles whom they had taken with them to find additional victims. They would surely alert the Polish and German police forces and conduct searches in the area. And indeed, we were not mistaken in our appraisal. We heard passers-by talking about a clash between Polish and Jewish partisans, about the police having taken away the bodies of our dear comrades Kuba Rypstajn, Aron Szwarc, Kuba Gliksztajn and one of the Russians, and about searches in the area. Our concern, at that moment, was for the injured Leon. We stood at the ready with cocked guns. This would probably be the last battle, but we were determined that their side, too, should suffer casualties.

Towards evening, we went out to inspect the bunker. As we had foreseen, the partisans had destroyed it. They had also paid the forester a visit. They had not searched the surrounding area because, for them also, it was not convenient to be about in the daytime - so they had left.

At the forester's, we found a terrifying image. The house had been trashed, while the owner was with a bandaged head, after having received a murderous beating, so that he would reveal the whereabouts of the remaining Jews. Chaim's cousin, who had been hidden all the while with the forester, had been executed by the partisans. Summarising the situation, it became clear to us that we should speedily quit this place, for it was obvious that the Polish fascists would not relent and desist until they found us. We were compelled to leave on foot - we headed for Roman Pindelak's house.

The Situation in the Vicinity Worsens

After a night of walking, we arrived at Roman's. Helcia received us warmly. Roman had, by then, already heard of what had happened to us and about the awakening of antisemitic sentiments that the incident had caused in the region. In his opinion, we would need to be extremely careful in order to prevent further casualties. While Helcia set out to Koniecpol to buy bandages and medication, Leon's mood improved, thanks to the general atmosphere and the dedicated treatment which he was receiving. Roman, meanwhile, managed to receive additional details and he urged us to quickly go out to the forest and hide under the branches of "our" tree, because the situation in the vicinity had worsened. The surrounding area was teeming with German and Polish police and, in the evenings, the Polish partisans were completing their "work".

Two days passed by without a visit from Roman or Helcia and we were left without food. The wounded Leon was very sensitive to fluctuations in heat and cold. At night, the cold tormented us. We had but one cloak amongst the three of us and we were forced to sleep in turns. The cloak needed to keep Leon warm, first and foremost. With many misgivings, we resolved to go out and seek a warm bed for the injured man, and a little food, although this entailed perils from they were liable to discover our tracks. Having no other choice, we entered the first farmhouse in the nearby village. We still had weapons. We explained to the farmer that we had a wounded man and that we required a bed and food. Without excessive enthusiasm, the peasant gave up his bed [and] we placed Leon in it.

Then food was prepared for all of us and thus we spent the night, guarding outside, and inside as well - that the owner should not go out.

At dawn, we returned to our tree with one or two days' supply of provisions and awaited Roman's arrival. After a few days, the intensive searches in the area ceased, and Roman and Helcia again welcomed us in high spirits. They told of the situation - of the increasing antisemitism amongst the local residents and of the blatant propaganda on part of the partisans. Despite all this, he proposed that we return to him. We could not live long in the woods, especially with the wounded Leon [and] while our clothing was so meagre. Jacek remained with Leon at Roman's. Helcia's faithful treatment of the injured Leon touched one's heart. She treated his wounds like an experienced nurse, although we did not always have bandages at our disposal. She [also] procured medication. This was a complicated matter, because the owner of the pharmacy asked many questions – why did she need so many bandages and drugs? This forced her to go far afield to obtain what was needed for the wounded man.

We, again, went out to visit Hajdas and other points. The situation was becoming stormier. Our members were being compelled to leave their refuges. The rumours in the vicinity were terrifying. At night, the peasants were scared to death, mainly of the partisans. The "seeing-to" which the forester had received from the partisans had made waves. [Our] members roamed about at night, without an address or a shelter and it should be noted that **the Hajdas family were the only ones who provided us with refuge during those difficult days.**

Our lot had been worsened several times over. The ghetto no longer existed. We were all alone in our campaign and we only had two rifles and one belt of ammunition. Our treasury was also empty. The only thing we could pin our hopes upon was the possibility of establishing contacts with Warsaw. We were, therefore, forced to make a cruel decision - to send Maciuś [?] and Lucek back to the camps in Częstochowa in order to report our situation. Perhaps they would be able to obtain aid for our wounded man. A few days later, Stach contacted us and told horrible things about the destruction the partisans had wreaked at his parents' house. They had demolished the house and beaten his parents murderously. He, himself, had had the good fortune not to be [then] at home. Stach requested the address of our comrades in Warsaw, which we gave him.

We visited Roman often, hoping to be able to renew any contacts. And then a contact woman whom we did not know arrived, in order to arrange a meeting between us and a group of Polish partisans. The goal was to join the group to the ranks of the partisans affiliated with the A.L.³⁸.

We did not know how this connection had been established, but we guessed that Stach had been involved. Indeed, several days later, the unit's commander, who was nicknamed "*Garbaty*" [Pol.; "Hunchback"], appeared. It was agreed that, at first, two members would go out with the weapons we had, barring the ammunition belt. The next time, they would take all of us with them. Jacek and Leon, who had meanwhile recovered from his wounds, left with "*Garbaty*."

³⁸ [TN: *Armia Ludowa; People's Army, a communist, pro-Soviet group backed by the Soviet Union.*]

Again, a sliver of hope had been awakened, although our treasury was empty - which forced us to make all sorts of dubious promises for the future.

Boruta Bolesław-Hanicz
R a d o m s k o
ul. Żymirskiego Nr. 42.

Do Radomsku, 7 II 49m
Ob. Mescha Szydłowskiego
u g d z i n
ul. Młeczejowska Nr. 42.

Zgodnie z pismem Zarządu Głównego Związku Bojowników z faszyzmem i Najazdem hitlerowskim o N. i D. w Warszawie dotycz. odnalezienia zwłok Ob. Leona Szydłowskiego, zawiadamiam, że w/w był istotnie w nich oddz. leśnych w stopniu kaprała.
Wiosną 1943 r. Szydłowski będąc z grupą kilku innych żołnierzy na akcji zapobiegawczej w pow. Włoszczowskiej został osaczony przez grupę "Osła" z A. K. gdzie został ranny w głowę.
Wszyscy inni jego towarzysze w tej liczbie dwóch Polaków i jeden Rosjanin zostali zamordowani.
Po wyzbrojeniu Leon Szydłowski w dalszym ciągu walczył z Niemcami w oddz. leśnych III-ciej Brygady A.L. im. Gen. Bema.
W dniu 6-go stycznia 1944 r. Leon Szydłowski zginął w walce z Niemcami w okolicach wsi Czechy w pow. Radomsko w czasie jednej z pacyfikacji hitlerowskich.
Wyżej wymieniony odznaczał się odwagą bojową i dyscypliną partyzancką.-
III-cia Brygada A. L. im. Gen. Bema utraciła w Leonie Szydłowskim doświadczonego żołnierza i bojownika o wyzwolenie Ojczyzny.-

b.d-ca III. Brygady A.L.
im. Gen. Bema-Hanicz.

P. S. Blizszych danych, gdzie zachowało się, Hania Boruta
udzielić mijr Chanin z Stach. Adres:
Toruń ul. Fredry 12 inspektor główny
Zarządu (szkół) Centralnego Instytutu
Nieruchomości Ziemiskich B. Hanicz Boruta

תעודה לזכרון ליאון שידלובסקי ז"ל, שהוצאה ע"י מפקדו לשעבר, סטאך, האניש.

Certificate to the fighter Leon Szydłowski z"l, which was issued by his former commander "Stach" Hanyż.

Władka the Contact Girl

We impatiently awaited the arrival of the contact person. We found it hard to believe that the connections with Warsaw had been renewed. We informed the Hajdas family of the [impending] visit and, two days later, the barn door opened and "Mama" Hajdas climbed up the ladder, followed by a girl who was unknown to us.

At first glance, she seemed completely Polish - with a scarf on her head, like the country girls, and a distinct Polish accent. Only the gaze of her bright and piercing eyes told another story. Once we were left alone, hearts were opened. Władka told us about Warsaw [and] gave us letters and greetings from Izaak Cukierman (Antek) and Cywia Lubetkin. The letters passed from hand to hand. We devoured every word and did not even notice that our tears were making the paper wet.

Władka spoke of the uprising and its aftermath, of the few who survived, of the underground movement and the connections. She also revealed to us that they had been trying to come to us for a very long time already, but there had always been impediments. She knew about Stach's visit to Warsaw and said that Antek had not been satisfied with the meeting. At first, they had not wished to meet him at all and, above all, they had refused to risk giving [him] addresses [of people].

We were asked to hold fast and persevere. They would do everything to ensure that the aid should reach us in time and we were not to make any hasty moves, Heaven forbid. Władka [also] told us of the troubles she had on her way to us, of the searches on the roads. She was also seeking to establish contact with the camp in Częstochowa and wanted to know every little detail about us. It turned out that she was a Bund member. She was forced to shorten her visit, as she needed to be on her way to Częstochowa on the business she had stated. She promised to maintain contact with us and left us the money she had brought. We wrote Antek and Cywia a report on our situation. Tolka, the Hajdas' daughter, was with us in the room most of the time during the visit. She listened well as to how we described our plight and contributed from her own knowledge of the vicinity, while she was also able to strike up a friendship with Władka. We parted company emotionally and Tolka accompanied her to Częstochowa.

Our feeling was that we had, again, somehow emerged from our isolation and that the comrades had not forsaken us. The Hajdas and Pindelak families, and Jan, continued to encourage us. Roman and Helcia, in their optimistic tone, said everything would work itself out. It was sad about the victims, but we needed to carry on.

We visited our comrades in other spots and gave them the good news. The money we had received helped us to temporarily extricate ourselves from the deficits that had been accumulated. Our central point was now at Hajdas'. There, they received us well, until we would be able to set up a new point.

But, despite the tranquillity, there was almost never a night without troubles. Here, members needed to be taken away from a point - there, people were ill. We were also worried by the lack of news from "Garbaty". By our reckoning, Władka should have been back already, but her return was being delayed. Meanwhile, the financial deficit grew again, but we lived in the hope that, any day, our redemption could come.

Sadly, we were not permitted to live long without tempests, bitter disappointments and the loss of the lives of dear comrades. We had a point at farmer Jakszyk's [?], a humorous and kind-hearted man, who seemed honest to us. He received us willingly. He promised to provide for our members and he also kept these promises. One time, when we were visiting with him, we heard shooting nearby, upon which we at once fled to the fields. A few moments later, Polish partisans came to him looking for Jews and they warned him not to dare being in contact with Jews. We thought that, since no Jews had been in his house, they would not return to search there again. Following this preposition, and having no other choice, we again left some of our members at Jakszyk's. At first, he was reluctant, fearing the consequences. But, after we convinced him, he built a special bunker and took in several members. But the Polish partisans would not let us be. Each night, they went out to search for us. This was their main occupation. One morning, they again came to Jakszyk and beat him murderously. Jakszyk gave nothing away but, following the tracks, they located the bunker. They brought our comrades out,

thrashed them and threw them down from the barn's hayloft. Those there were Juda Gliksztajn, Jakób Gelbhauer, Mojsze Wajsfelner, Fela Zborowska and Bela Bram, whose leg was broken in her fall. Our six members lay in the fields, unable to leave the location and they intended to report the incident in the evening. Bela was writhing with her extreme pain and Juda approached a peasant to ask him for water for her. But the peasant, instead of providing a little water, went to notify the Polish police. They arrived directly, captured everyone and loaded them onto wagons. Those of our members who were staying at the time with Janek, not far from the scene of the incident, clearly heard peasants talking about searches in the area. Janek gave them updates every half-hour and was afraid that they might search his place, also. The following day, he provided details of how our comrades, who had been captured by the police, had been executed. Afterwards, we learned that the same partisans, who had thrown our comrades from the hayloft, had in the morning notified the Polish authorities.

Either way, we had once more become the talk of the day in the vicinity. Jews were being pursued by the partisans. We were again under siege - with no way out. Members, who had managed to come to us after the liquidation of the ghetto and the disbandment of ŻOB, [and] who had believed that the day would come when they would be able to engage the enemy in battle with a weapon in their hands, had once more been killed. And at whose hands? At the hands of the Poles - "partisans," "freedom fighters," as it were.

Over time, our plight worsened. We increased our vigilance. Our night visits never stopped. We searched for new points. We had no weapons, no money and no news from our comrades with "Garbaty" had reached us yet. From Warsaw, too, despite Władka's promises, nothing was heard. The encouragement we drew from our visits with Roman and from the Hajdas family's humane approach, helped us endure the circumstances. More than once, we marvelled at the Hajdas household members' comportment. "Mama" Hajdas did not speak of the incident. She continued gaily cheering us up and Tolka never gave up on us. Most of the time, she spoke about the situation and continued to encourage us.

After days of nervous tension, Władka finally arrived from Warsaw. This time, too, she brought letters from Antek and Cywia, which called on us, in a spirit of camaraderie and combativeness, to persevere. We were again heartened by the fact that we had not remained alone. Władka, who had already heard about our troubles from Roman, told us about the events in Warsaw and of the connections with London and the Polish underground movement. The high command and the general staff had promised to aid [us] and we requested personal contact with Warsaw, so that we should be able to send Tolka there in the hour of need. Władka was reluctant at first, but in the end gave [us] the address. Once again, Tolka accompanied Władka to Częstochowa.



Monument in commemoration of the partisans who fell as heroes: Herszberg Alek, Flamenbaum Maniek, Krauze Janek, Rozenblat Jerzyk, Rychter Heniek, and Szain Szlamek.

Then, disappointing news reached us. The contact person from the Polish side had been killed by shots fired at him while he was escaping. Connections had been severed and Tolka had become the primary contact person. It was hard to imagine life without Tolka. She was pained by our problems like one of our own, proposing audacious schemes, which were difficult to accept, as we could not put the Hajdas family in danger.

Sometime afterwards, we were told to gather at Roman's, where we would be put in contact with the *Bataliony Chłopskie* people. Apparently, the matter had been arranged by headquarters in Warsaw. At first, we were apprehensive, as we did not know their attitude towards Jews, but we yearned to be out in the open and to join fighting units. We gathered our comrades from the points and split up into several groups. In high spirits, we went towards Roman's house. Suddenly, Chaim warned his companion that, with his sharp eyes which noticed any movement in the woods, he sensed that something was not right. That same instant, a command was heard - "Halt! Who are you?". Without waiting for a response, it was followed by a volley of shots aimed at us from all sides! The group hurriedly dispersed in disorder and, luckily, this time there were no casualties. Afterwards, a few more incidents happened on the way. Once we all had gathered, none of the contact people showed up and our suspicions were aroused that the "warm" welcome on the way had been absolutely intentional. Thus, another illusion had been shattered.

Meanwhile, several members arrived from the camp in Częstochowa, while our situation became increasingly hopeless. Communications with Warsaw were once again cut off. Chaim Becher had already employed every trick in his bag [to procure aid] from his acquaintances, but they all feared the partisans. Money had once more run out. The winter was harsh and it was impossible to send the members back to the camp.

At Garbaty's Camp

One night in January 1944, when we were extremely worried about the fate of our comrades who were with Garbaty, Jacek arrived, tired and nervous. The first condition with Garbaty was [that one should have] a weapon and a good "Aryan" look. This is why Jacek and Leon had gone there. Jacek told of the events that they had been through since leaving us. Garbaty was accompanied by twelve soldiers on horseback (this was an interesting innovation, for we were accustomed to wagons as the only means of transportation). After a two-night journey, we arrived at the camp's gathering point – in the Lublin area, I think - and a new world opened up before us. Other customs and concepts - a military camp. All were divided into units and groups, with [individual] weapons and machine-guns as well. We were told our camp would operate together with camps from other regions. Stach Hanyż, too, would come with his battalion. And then proactive operations against the Germans would commence - large-scale skirmishes and acts of sabotage. The entire region was under the swathe of leftist and communist parties.

Unfortunately, after the first two days, we found ourselves amongst Ukrainians who had served in Vlasov's units and Poles who had questionable pasts. When they asked us who we were, we spoke openly of our origins and of the Koniecpol group that was about to join, etc. We felt the repercussions at once on our own flesh. When they allotted us to [different] farmers to spend the night, they would incite the homeowners against us, revealing our identities and the farmer would demand that we leave the property.

We were put in difficult situations. The partisans were apportioned an ironclad allowance, which included [salted] pork fat and a decent measure of spirits. They would get drunk and, more than once in their conduct, they reminded Vlasov's Ukrainians [who were] with the Germans during the *akcje* in the ghetto.

In the unit in which we were, there were two Jews who obstinately refused to reveal their identities. We were surrounded by hatred, as in those days [in the ghetto]. We attempted speaking to Garbaty, but his attitude was correct, nothing more. Sometime later, we were notified that Stach had arrived with his battalion. We gladly ran to welcome him, hoping that things would now change. But his response was rather cool. He acted elusively upon seeing us and we did not approach him again. Two

Jews had come with him - Domb's sister and our townsman Hamelin. Our dissolution was great, but there was no escaping [the facts] - we were forced to accept reality.

In the harsh winter months, Leon's condition deteriorated. Regarding group matters, we now turned only to Garbaty, who would always give us an elusive answer. He once took me to accompany him on a journey to our regions. We thought that the time had come to transfer the group and I happily set forth. But Garbaty's purpose was to get the ammunitions belt from us. To my queries regarding the group, he invariably replied, "The time has not yet come". During that period, we conducted several punitive operations against collaborators with the Germans and attacked a few police points. We were always hearing the explanation that the group did not wish to meet other partisans and we always operated within areas which were politically convenient for us. I recall a pleasant meeting with a group of gypsies. Garbaty showed an interest in them and received them well.

Suddenly, rumours came of a German manhunt in our area. Garbaty desired more accurate information on the situation. He gave me the mission to go to a contact person. He delivered his instructions and also a location was appointed, where we were to meet upon my return from the mission. At the end, he added, "I presume that, with your past and experience, you'll know to be cautious, and fulfil the mission [well]". I told Leon about the mission when we parted.

I came as planned to the contact person - an insightful, young girl, who was well aware of world events and she received me well. Looking at my clothes, she did not leave off, until I had handed my linen over to her for washing, which had waited a long time for an operation of this kind. I would have to wait for her to answer Garbaty's questions anyway, she argued. Her attitude and attention, compared with the demonstrations of unconcealed hatred [at the camp], granted me hours of relaxation and pleasantness.

According to Garbaty's instructions, I was only to remain there a few hours, but it was not possible to do so and I stayed the night. When, in the morning, the contact girl was unable to obtain the required information, she became worried and went out to find out what was happening. I was to wait for an answer. Meanwhile, something unexpected occurred. Voices and noise were heard! The landlord entered in a state of panic and ordered me to go down into the cellar, as Germans had arrived in the village. Soon afterwards, the landlord came and told me to leave, because his wife was not willing to have me in the house. I went outside, crawled amongst the houses and I was barely able to make it to the woodland and escape the dangerous location.

I arrived at the place where we were to meet, but no one was waiting for me. Garbaty showed no signs of life. Eventually, I did manage to find them. I found Leon in a despondent mood - lonely [and] disappointed. All around was an ocean of hate, but it was good to be together. At headquarters, they were sure that I had been caught by the Germans. They had heard of the manhunt in the village and the searches in the houses. They were sure that I had been broken and given up the information I knew. Garbaty had ordered for the site to be cleared. From what they said, it seemed that they had given up on seeing me in freedom.

Our situation worsened. Garbaty, also, began changing his attitude. In his conversations on Jewish affairs, he spoke against the Jews who were hiding from the Germans. These Jews, he said, had plenty of money and they hated the working class. "Randomly", as it were, it was decided that we should go out on the most hazardous sentry duties and patrols. More than once, we listened in on the conversations of the Vlasov people, [as to] who would inherit our wristwatches.

As Christmas neared, the central command decided to return to the safe area. They intended to celebrate the holiday properly, with heavy drinking and gluttony. There was absolutely no supervision

on the part of the central command. During the holidays and several days afterwards, they truly went wild. The consequences were not long in coming. The groups, who were hostile to us, noticed us and informed the authorities.

A rumour spread that a siege had been laid on us, whereupon a panic-stricken escape ensued. Confusion pervaded the ranks - some even threw down their weapons. We ran for 24 hours, through the night, until we managed to put a distance between us and the Germans and detach from them. We trudged drowsily through half-metre high snow. We were exhausted and depleted.

The Germans had decided to eliminate us. They brought in reinforcements and continued pursuing us. Wishing to make the peasants rise up against us, they burned down all the villages through which we passed. They eventually caught up with us. After a day of pursuit, they surrounded us. We attempted to breach the encirclement, but to no avail. The Germans awaited us in open terrain and aimed concentrated gunfire at us. I was together with Leon the entire time. We ran and fell [to the ground], again and again. I suddenly heard a croak from Leon's mouth. He had been hit by a bullet and died instantaneously. In one of the groves, the shooting was so fierce and concentrated that it cut down trees. As I was running, I saw a wagon with farmers traveling along the road. I managed to escape the range of the bullets and come over to them. I forced them at gunpoint to take me. I concealed the rifle in the wagon and was thus able to pass the blockade. Later, I again hid the rifle and, after several days of recuperation, I brought it to the base.

This time, Roman was badly shaken. He had believed that we would all be able to join Garbaty's ranks. Helcia, who had hoped to see Leon alive and well, wept disconsolately.

Illusions had once more been shattered. The ground had been taken from under our feet. So many attempts to come into contact with the partisans and, always, the same result.

A Messenger from Warsaw

After a prolonged interval, again a messenger arrived from Warsaw. This time it was Irena, a "perfect Aryan", with a noble appearance - although she did have some difficulties along the way in the countryside. We had not been at Roman's that night and we did not know of her arrival, whilst she was unable to convince the Hajdas family, by any means, that she had come for our sake. All reasoning was useless. "Mama" Hajdas was adamant - she knew nothing and nobody. Irena had lost hope until Tolka arrived. She came to us to take counsel and we then agreed to receive her. Irena brought letters not only from Antek and Cywia, but also from Professor Chaim Weizmann and other figures of the Settlement [in Palestine], which were for us an injection of courage and additional strength.

We reported our situation to Warsaw and requested assistance to leave the region, because we knew that we would not be able to do this on our own.

We explained to Irena our difficult financial conditions, which had not improved much, despite the fact that she had brought us a decent amount of money and she promised to see to it that our situation should improve.

The connections with the HASAG and Raków camps in Częstochowa were, by now, already in Tolka's hands, who attended to the transfer of letters and money from here to there and back.

From the Police Force to the Partisans

Following the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", Stach Domb came to us. He had served in the Jewish police. This was a young, robust lad with strong hands but, nevertheless, an extremely negative type, who ingratiated himself with the Germans and "excelled" in administering beatings. There was almost no opportunity on which those to receive lashings were not submitted to Domb's "treatment".

It is not known how he arrived at Roman's address. Be that as it may, we received him with mixed feelings. Some thought that he should be driven off at once, while others argued that he should be given the chance to prove himself. As the opinion of those who were more lenient, we admitted him into our ranks. Despite his background, we endeavoured to instruct him and bring him closer to our concepts, so that he should become as one of us. He was put in Hanyż's group of combatants, but his conduct was disappointing. He would invent all sorts of excuses just in order to avoid carrying out the tasks he was given. He never once saw a mission through to its completion. He always turned back to the base midways. In one of the crises (and we were blessed with many), following the elimination of Hanyż's group, when we were compelled to leave our places, he tried to incite the Hajdas family against us. He urged them not to take anyone in, except himself, and promised in return to make over to them, after the War, a flour mill in Częstochowa. We learnt of his scheme in time and were able to foil it.

One night, he was sent to deliver a pair of shoes to a certain point and, upon his return, he said that he had been compelled to throw them away, because he had chanced upon Poles, who had then chased after him, shooting. The next day, it became known that he had sold them to Janek. There were various other similar incidents.

As things stood, we had no choice but to hold a trial. We sought extenuating circumstances, but none were found and he was sentenced to death. On 26th June 1944, the [1st] anniversary of the liquidation of ŻOB [in Częstochowa], we gathered the majority of our members from the points [and] the verdict was read and then carried out on the spot.

Tolka as a Contact Person

Warsaw, as usual, was not on schedule and, because we knew this [delay] was dictated by the circumstances, Tolka firmly demanded that we allow her to travel to Warsaw to see to matters there. But we remembered our promise to Władka, that this would only be done if all hope was lost.

Although we were already familiar with the Hajdas family's ways with us, once in a while, they still managed to surprise us. One time, they bought their adult son a pair of boots, but he complained that something was bothering him when he walked. He grubbed about in those boots a great deal, until he discovered a five-dollar gold coin. "Mama" Hajdas came to us at once, radiant with joy, and told us about the find. "Nu, you see", she said, "never despair! You just have to have faith - then everything will be alright". The find came just in time and gave us some breathing-space until the emissary from Warsaw arrived.

After a long time, an emissary arrived. He was a Polish constable in uniform, who brought letters and money, plus a large quantity of material for the camps in Częstochowa. This time, we took the opportunity of the constable's arrival, and we sent Tolka, as the contact person, with him. She returned glowing with delight, having taken responsibility and perils upon herself. We, too, felt somewhat relieved.

On her journeys, she took her baby boy Zenek with her and, inside his clothes, she concealed the letters, money, and underground press. This trick aided her greatly during body searches, as there was no journey without surprises. But Tolka also knew very well how to face danger. This was also the case for her contacts with the camps in Częstochowa. We were sometimes surprised by the intelligence she revealed, facing dangers and in complicated tests. After all, were she to fall into the hands of the Germans, not only would that spell the end of all of us, but of the entire Hajdas household as well, and her responsibility was immense. Each and every time she travelled, we were anxious for her return, and we shared in her elation once the mission had been completed.

Irena and Kazik, who had been active in the Warsaw ghetto uprising, and after the uprising too, came from Warsaw to visit us several times.

Thanks to Tolka's contacts with the camps in Częstochowa, our connections with our members there tightened. An uninterrupted exchange of news and letters enabled us to keep fully abreast of the situation in the camps, of [our members'] operations and of [their] various attempted acts of sabotage. The camps requested the transfer of members of the organisation to us. The earlier operations of transferring [people] from the camps to the forest were still fresh in our memories. The first time we left the camp, we did not know the way. We walked in the direction of Małusy, straight through a village. The village watchmen spotted us and began to chase us. We threatened them with the broken and rusty pistol we had found in the camp and they begged us to leave them alone. We then ordered them to lie on the ground for ten seconds and we continued, in a roundabout way, to our destination.

Another time, the escape from the camp had been successful. We crossed the road on the way to Małusy, at a time when they were digging anti-tank ditches. A car suddenly stopped in front of us, from which two Germans emerged and asked us where we were going. "Home", we replied. They were probably not sure whether we were Jews, but we seemed suspicious [to them] anyway. So, they called those guarding the ditches and ordered them to take us to the police station. Upon hearing this, we leapt into the ditches and fled. The ditches were not built in a straight line and the Germans did not pursue us from up above, but jumped down into them behind us. We managed to reach the end of the ditch first - near a small grove. We lay down on the ground there and our pursuers were convinced that we had continued running on. They passed the grove without seeing us – and so we were saved. When darkness fell, we rose and made it safely to Roman's house.

Once, the Germans chased one of our members up to the Pilica River. He was forced to swim across the river and he came to us swollen and frozen. Only with great efforts were we able to nurse him back to health.

The Last Contact with the Partisans

Sometime later, we were given hints that a Polish uprising in Warsaw was being planned and we dreamed of joining the ranks of the fighters. But, with the outbreak of the rebellion in the months August-November 1944, contact with Warsaw was severed and, once more, we entered a severe crisis. We were always hoping that our comrades in Warsaw would find ways to contact us, but weeks and months went by without any news. We could not travel to Warsaw. The city was being gradually destroyed [and] its inhabitants were being evacuated. We waited - exhausted and despondent. On the other hand, the Hajdas family had proven their faithfulness to us [and, now,] "Mama" revealed the full extent of her situation to us. The larders were empty [and] they did not have from whom to borrow [anything]. Being left with no other choice, we decided to carry out an operation to acquire food although, in our condition, with an unceasing hunt for partisans being conducted, it was the same as suicide. But, incredibly - the operation was a success.

Nevertheless, we could not continue doing this, as there had already been gossip about us. Meanwhile, we were under great pressure from the camps - to transfer members to us. The battle between conscience and the "will to survive", which is implanted in each man's heart, raged in all its fury and, here again, Tolka surprised us with her initiative.

Contacts with Warsaw were renewed and, this time Stefan Grajek and Marysia arrived. Our joy was great [and] we received fresh news of our comrades' activities.

Stefan revealed to us events, which it had till then been impossible to share with us by letter. We heard about the wide circle of connections with institutions - here and abroad. Each news item brings a deep experience with it and, once more, the feeling of camaraderie among warriors and of sharing one fate beats [within us]. With elated spirits and a spark of hope in the heart, we part company with our friends, Stefan and Marysia.

The following day, Tolka brought money and news to the camps in town. Unfortunately, worrying news come from there - the liquidation of the camps was imminent and nobody knew what the final result would be.

Sensational news reached us at Roman's. A messenger from Garbaty came to us, requesting that we send him a delegation in order to negotiate the execution of acts of sabotage in our vicinity. Due to the region's reactionary character, the A.L. [Armia Ludowa] men found it difficult to operate and it was therefore desirable that we should be the ones to carry out the missions.

We were again thrilled with the hopes that we may, finally, go out on proactive operations against the enemy and we waited impatiently for the coordinators of the talks [to arrive]. We passed through the points and gave the news of the important event.

This time, Garbaty was not found wanting. The coordinators arrived and we immediately set out with them, without delay. We managed to pass safely through our district and, when we were 15-20 km from our destination, [in] the territory controlled by the A.L. men, we noticed an extraordinary commotion. Shots from different weapons rang out in the distance. We were still wondering what these shots could be, when it became known that the Germans were mounting a broadside attack on Garbaty's camp. As the front neared, the Germans wanted to cleanse the rear of cells of partisans. In the situation in which had been caught up, our hopes were dashed once again - this time, it had been the last hope. On our way back to our area, we were surprised at the heavy concentration of German military units. We had no possibility of retreat whatsoever. With cocked guns, we lay flat, down on the ground. Fortunately, they beamed the searchlights 20-30 cm off the ground and did not notice us. This danger-laden encounter was to be our last for, mere days later, on 15th January 1945, we were liberated by the Soviet Army.

