

Maciej (Mojze) Krauze

Ready for Battle



With the establishment of the “Small Ghetto” in Częstochowa, the underground movement was set up. The Jewish settlement, which had numbered between 55,000 to 60,000 in the “Big Ghetto”, was annihilated in the gas-chambers of Treblinka. Only some five thousand people remained - mostly the young - who categorically cast aside the ideal of passivity, choosing the path of armed resistance.

I, as a former member of the Polish army, immediately joined ŻOB and, with the blessing of its leaders, Rywka Glanc, Heniek Pejsak and Josek Kantor, became an official of the Labour Council. The Labour Council in the “Small Ghetto,” which had been appointed by the German authorities to be their expositor, in reality became a relief-institution for the underground movement.

In the morning, when the labourers went out to work, the foreman received as many food-ration coupons as there were people going to work. The members of the underground were unable to go to work, because they were engaged in building tunnels which connected the “Small Ghetto” to the “Aryan side”. I needed to provide these comrades with food, as well as creating reserves of victuals, in case of an emergency.

The work at the ammunitions factory HASAG-Pelcery was done in two shifts - one week in the day and one week at night. Those who worked at night were issued special permits, which gave them the right to be inside the ghetto during daytime. In order to prevent forgeries, the permits were changed every week. I provided members of the underground with such permits. If a Jew was found inside the “Small Ghetto” without a permit, he was at once shot by the S.S. men.

On 23rd April 1943, Rywka Glanc came from the “Aryan side” and handed me a proclamation, in the Polish language, which needed to be printed in four thousand copies by 27th April. With difficulty, I procured the necessary paper [and], on the 26th at 19:00, I went inside the Labour Council [office], closed the shutters and applied myself to the task. Two members of ŻOB stood outside as lookouts. Suddenly, I heard the pre-agreed signal - I turned off the light and immediately the noise of a car could be heard. Degenhardt, may his name be obliterated, the commander of the “Small Ghetto,” and hangman of the Częstochowa Jewry and that of the entire Radom district, had precisely then arrived to carry out an unexpected inspection, seeking victims to shoot. Twenty minutes later, I received a new signal and the work was resumed.

At five o'clock in the morning, a freight van arrived and took the proclamations, two typewriters and a papyrograph¹. Everything arrived safely to the partisans in the forest.

When members of ŻOB went away into the forest or to operations and were not supposed to return, I would report a smaller number of people, because upon returning from work, the S.S. were liable to carry out an inspection and, if the numbers did not add up, it could end in victims.

¹ [TN: An apparatus for multiplying writings, drawings, etc., in which a paper stencil, formed by writing or drawing with corrosive ink, is used. The word is also used of other means of multiplying copies of writings, drawings, etc. (Webster's Dictionary, 1913)]

There were also instances when the factory security was paid off to allocate groups to certain locations, from which they went off into the forest. Once, at five in the morning, security was leading away a group of ten ŻOB members, who were going to join the Jewish partisans of Polish Kamieniec, under the leadership of Bolek Gwircman. The group was accidentally spotted by a Polish police-sergeant - Majznerowicz - who at once informed Zoppart, Degenhardt's deputy. I was held under arrest at the police station in the ghetto. During the interrogation, knowing that 10-15 workers had remained overnight at the *Heeresbauamt* [military construction department] workplace, I declared that the ten workers were needed to be early in the morning to unload carriages. Zoppart and the constables ascertained that a group of Jewish labourers was, in fact, at the workplace. When I was under arrest, the leaders of ŻOB - Mietek and Józek Kantor - appeared and informed me that, in a couple of minutes, an operation would be conducted to set me free. I absolutely forbade them to carry this mission out, as I was certain that there were more than ten Jewish workers at the workplace. Once it had been proven that my declarations were true, I was released. But the police warned me that the next time I sent labourers to work at an hour that had not been previously arranged, I would pay with my own head.

Before ŻOB's underground bunkers had been set up, weapons and money were hidden in my own dwelling. Also, during police-raids, members of ŻOB were hidden in my apartment, because on the door hung a note, signed by Lieutenant Zoppart, that the keys were at the Labour Council. Therefore, no suspicions fell upon the apartment.

Following the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", together with other Jewish workers, I was sent to HASAG-Pelcery from where, on 17th January 1945, I was liberated.

