

Zvi Wiernik

The Żłoty Potok Group

We placed great value on making connections with groups of the Polish Resistance and pinned many hopes on this, despite the fact that they disappointed us almost every time. We even paid the high price with the blood of our comrades. Besides the natural desire to belong to a larger camp identifying with our cause, we aspired to break free of the suffocation of the ghetto, which was surrounded by German policemen and their helpers, and to wage war against the Nazi enemy in appropriate battlefield conditions, by storming German positions, sabotage, etc.

Therefore, members of ŻOB who, before the War, had belonged to different [political] parties, contacted their fellow Polish [party] members (each party had its own underground organisation), hoping that these connections would eventually pay off and help them leave the ghetto to join their comrades, the partisans. Our members left the ghetto on dangerous missions in the Kielce, Warsaw, and Zagłębie regions, in order to strengthen the ties with the Jewish underground which was active there, as well as with Polish activists and Russian partisans, who operated in the woods in the Lublin area.

Most often, the Poles wanted money from us. They sometimes gave us low-quality, almost unusable weapons or fed us false promises. In this context, one may well understand our great joy when our comrade Chaskel Kantor announced that there was an opportunity to come into contact with the Polish commander, Langewicz. The information, which we received, was that he had a vast arsenal of weapons at his disposal and that he wished to aid our underground movement to establish an organised unit, which would operate, hand in hand, with his experienced men in the Żłoty Potok area. Our joy increased even more when our expectations were justified. In the many meetings which were held between us in the Kamionka vicinity (by the Raków factory), as well as inside the ghetto, in which Langewicz and his deputy Stach visited, we came to understand that these men were serious and their ideals pure. Langewicz and Stach followed our organisational efforts closely and were particularly impressed with our manufacture of hand-grenades, which they tested out in practice. Satisfied with what they had seen, the Poles began to organise groups to go out into the forest.

In June, the first groups were sent out (the majority of whom had served in the Polish army), among whom were Romek Fajgenblat, the Jezy brothers, Natan Zborowski, Izaak Sarecki, the Fink brothers, Dudek Winer, Szulim Laszer, Bernard Chraport and others. They were followed by Abram Woznica, the Bladek brothers, Jurek Chajutin, Ignacy Jakubson, Izrael Tenenbaum, Motek and Jakób Włodowski and others. But, unfortunately, fate was cruel with this group from its first day. The Polish coordinator did not arrive at the agreed place and time and, having no other option, they began scouting the vicinity. But the peasants did not view favourably the fact that Jews were roaming about on the land and denounced them to the Polish police.

Chases, hiding and troubles ensued, until the men found an isolated house, belonging to the forester, in the Żłoty Potok woods. He promised assistance and contact with other underground groups. But, on their way to where this group was, they came upon German gendarmes. A skirmish ensued in which many of our comrades were killed, while a few dispersed throughout the area. It was unknown as to whether the encounter had been accidental or if the Pole had betrayed them and informed the Germans.

Meanwhile, in the ghetto, it was decided to send reinforcements. To this purpose, Harry Potaszewicz, Pinek Samsonowicz and Lolek Blank set out, equipped with arms and detailed instructions. But for them, too, a trap had been set. The driver, transporting the group, had informed and they were captured. Potaszewicz was seriously wounded and brought to the ghetto, where he was tortured and [then] murdered by the Gestapo. Only Lolek managed to escape.

A few days after this tragic incident, on 26th June 1943, the "Small Ghetto" was liquidated, thus sealing the group's fate. The Germans' manhunt, with the cooperation of the Polish police, dealt a mortal blow. The majority of our members fell. Dudek Wajnryb and his brother came injured to the ghetto one day before its liquidation, and later perished in the mass murder. Władek Chajutin found refuge at a peasant's house and was able to make it to Raków. Several other individuals managed to arrive in the camp, whilst Mietek Jakób reached the group, which operated in the Koniecpol area. The Polish commander Langewicz and his deputy were also captured by the Gestapo at the regular meeting place next to Raków. During a meeting with Mojtek, the house was surrounded by German gendarmes and a clash ensued. Mojtek and Chaskel Kantor managed to escape and arrived safely inside the ghetto. But the Germans caught Ewa Lenczner and Berman there and murdered them.