

# Production of Grenades

## in the Częstochowa “Small Ghetto”

(From the book *Churban Czenstochow*)

The Jewish Fighting Organisation, in the “Small Ghetto”, obtained its first weaponry by purchasing pistols and ammunition on the “Aryan side”. The guns often turned out to be faulty, and the prices were fantastically high. These two reasons motivated the high command to start their own production, with the aim of arming the partisans in the woods and preparing a large number of pistols, bullets and grenades, in the ghetto, for the imminent, unavoidable battle against the Nazi forces.

To this end, the ŻOB’s high command member, Heniek Wiernik, organised a technical group of dedicated fighters, [who were] qualified workmen and graduates of the Craft School, which included locksmiths, electricians and chemists. The group was comprised of ten individuals:

Heniek Wiernik,  
his wife Natka,  
Heniek Kaufman (a chemist),  
Benjamin Mandelbaum,  
Lajzer Szmulewicz,  
Zyskind Szmulewicz,  
Mojśze Rużański,  
Benjamin Erenfryd,  
Abram Czarny and  
Mendel Wilinger.

At first, an “everlasting spring” pistol was manufactured, [but] it turned out that the application of the “everlasting spring” was effective in battle at a shorter distance and its complexity cost many hours of labour. It was due to this that headquarters abandoned the project, [and also] because, in the meantime it, had received pistols and rifles.

Consequently, the necessity arose to manufacture a larger quantity of hand-grenades. Heniek Wiernik decided to produce a “cocktail” – these were one-litre bottles filled with explosive chemicals. The “cocktail” was used in the following manner: one shook up the bottle in order for the liquid to mix with the explosive material and then hurled it at the desired target. When the bottle broke, the explosion took place, engulfing its surroundings in fire. The “cocktail” was most effective in anti-tank warfare and was used in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The production of hand-grenades in the “Small Ghetto”, at first, turned out to be very hard and complicated, because the Germans had already taken away all the machines for working metal before the ghetto was formed. In the “Wulkan” factory, which belonged to the two Jews, Preger and Landau, there were a large number of members of the technical group, working as qualified labourers. As a result, they were not supervised so much during work and were able to circulate

[freely] throughout the different departments. This was the basis for the plan to start making the first grenades there.

As a result of organisational and professional discussions, it was decided to produce, as a test, a few grenades made up of two parts. In practicality, it emerged that this plan was not feasible, because the whole grenade needed to be made from a material whose explosion time was equal all around and, in the welds, this was impossible. Secondly, the production needed to be carried out in the greatest secrecy, guarding oneself against the Polish workers and, thirdly, taking the manufactured items from the factory to the “Small Ghetto” was fraught with perils, due to the frequent searches upon leaving the factory and entering the “Small Ghetto”.

Consequently, it was decided to find a metal alloy which could be brought to a liquid state at a temperature of 800°C. At such a temperature, the production could be carried out with primitive equipment in the ghetto, with the aid of a crucible – viz. a pot with a mass capable of withstanding that temperature.

Following this decision, the intensive work of procuring the raw materials began and the making the “*kokil*”<sup>1</sup>, which is a two-part mould for casting the grenades. Obtaining the raw materials was no easy feat, and it was even more difficult to make the “*kokil*”, because one needed to use an entire array of machines and guard oneself from the eyes of strangers. The “*kokil*” was made in the “Wulkan” factory and was smuggled into the “Small Ghetto” in a canister of food that was brought from the ghetto to the factory and carried back again.

In the “Small Ghetto”, the *Judenrat* had a technical department with several machines that were necessary for the production. The technical department’s duties were to carry out different repairs in the ghetto. The leaders of the technical department were Koniecpoler and Zylberszac. They were influenced by the members of the underground movement and gave them the keys to the workshop for the necessary time.

They began a whole series of tests with different metals, because the grenade’s casing must neither be too hard nor too soft – when used in battle, it needs to shatter into small fragments. After an entire array of tests, they settled on an alloy of zinc and aluminium which fitted all the requirements.

The raw materials needed were procured from the storerooms of the HASAG munitions factory, by members of the underground movement who worked there.

After manufacturing the first hundred grenades, there were new difficulties in obtaining the explosive material. The matter was tended to by Wiernik and Kaufman, who made a provisional laboratory and prepared the proper explosive materials.

<sup>1</sup> [TN: A small basin sometimes made of metal or even porcelain.]

The chemicals, with which to produce the explosives, were procured on the "Aryan side", and some were supplied by the ghetto's chemist, Praszkiwicz.

Once the first hand-grenades were ready, they were sent to several places on the "Aryan side" to be tested. They received satisfying responses from all the locations, to the effect that this was an important weapon in the war against the Nazi regime.

As a result of the experience gained, production rose to a hundred grenades per day. The high command member, Sumek Abramowicz, arranged a special appeal and urged the technical group to make every possible effort to fill this quota, because the partisans in the woods were in need of grenades, and a large quantity also needed to be prepared for the ghetto.

In the "Small Ghetto", also, the work was conducted under the strictest secrecy, because there were people with "long tongues" going about, of whom one needed to be cautious, because they were in the service of the Gestapo, SS and other pests. There were also cases when such elements became harmful, and they were liquidated by a court ruling of the organisation.

The completed grenades were sent, in part, to the

*Częstochower* partisans in the Koniecpol forests and some were stashed in the bunkers that had been prepared, built underground on ul Nadrzeczna.

A special commission of the ŻOB underground movement in Warsaw arrived, which took a keen interest in the grenade production in the *Częstochowa* "Small Ghetto".

The high command of the *Częstochowa* ŻOB organisation decided that, once a certain quantity of grenades had been produced for the "Small Ghetto's" internal needs, the whole technical group would be relocated to the "Aryan side", where they would develop, unmolested, a mass-production of grenades for all the organisations fighting the Nazi regime.

Unexpectedly, the "Small Ghetto" was surrounded on 26th June 1943 and completely liquidated. Several members of the technical group fell in the battle during the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", and the rest were barracked in the HASAG-Pelcery and HASAG-Raków camps.

The surviving members of the technical group also did not rest in the HASAG camps. They continued producing grenades for the partisans operating in the woods, in order to paralyse the German offensive force and to hasten the Nazi downfall.

## From the Book *Churban Czenstochow*

(Chapter: *The Jewish Communal and Cultural Life in the "Big Ghetto", the "Small Ghetto" and the HASAG-Pelcery Camp*)

### For Their Death Anniversary

(In place of flowers on the unknown graves  
of the ghetto fighters and partisans)

*No! No longer shall I lament and weep,  
Clasping my hands in grief,  
No longer shall I sigh and doubt,  
Letting my hands powerlessly down.*

*Brothers and sisters, heroes, martyrs,  
You fell in the bloodied battle,  
In the fight against the tyrant, the Führer,  
And against his brutal regime.*

*No! No longer shall I lament and weep,  
Letting down a tear from my eye.  
No longer shall I grieve and cry,  
Although there is no longer anyone to console me.*

*I shall sing out my reverence for you,  
With words from a heart bleeding by day and by night.  
Sorrowful songs shall ring out for you,  
For the glory of heroes fallen in battle.*

### Ghetto Poem

*Bitter is the life in the ghetto,  
Space is measured down to the inch.  
There is nowhere to move,  
One becomes sick of life.*

*I fall ill – they save me by operating.  
Still, no one wishes me to recover.  
What do I want such a life for,  
If my desires come to naught?*

*My hair has turned white,  
My eyes express hatred and rage.  
What do I want such a life for,  
If my desires are destroyed?*

*My weary hands clench into fists,  
To break down the ghetto's walls,  
To remove the barbed wire,  
That the spectre should vanish as a shadow.*

**Częstochowa "Small Ghetto", March 1943**