

# Figures From the Częstochowa Underground Movement

(From the book *Churban Czenstochow*)

## Mojtek Zylberberg

### Commander of the ŻOB Underground Movement in the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto"

Mojtek Zylberberg was born in 1910 in Kalisz. He was noted for his intelligence and ability to take the initiative. He had a *gimnazjum* education. Before the War, he was active in the Revisionist movement. At the end of 1940, he left Kalisz and came to Częstochowa, where he was active in the *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* organisation. During the period of the "Big Ghetto", he was an unknown refugee and earned his living from trade.

In the time of the tragic deportations, he was selected and sent to *Metalurgia* and, from there, to HASAG-Pelcery, where he was barracked. When he was in the camp, sharing the tragic fate of Częstochowa Jewry, he decided to organise an underground movement. To this end, he became a policeman.

Under the worst and most horrifying conditions during the period of the first barracking in HASAG-Pelcery, when everyone was depressed and mentally and physically broken, he began to secretly promulgate the idea of resistance and organised a group made up exclusively of those who, before the War, had been active members in different organisations. The idea was received with enthusiasm, and the group grew from day to day.

Once the "Small Ghetto" was established, the Jews barracked in HASAG-Pelcery were sent there to live. When Mojtek Zylberberg arrived in the "Small Ghetto", he found that the groundwork had already been laid. The *kibbutzim* had already been reorganised as separate organisations. There were three *kibbutzim*:

- 1) *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, under the leadership of Juda Gliksztajn, who was later active in the Koniecpol woods with a group of partisans and was killed by the AK;
- 2) *Dror*, under the command of Rywka Glanc, who fell in the battle during the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", and
- 3) *Gordonia*<sup>1</sup>.

Mojtek Zylberberg unified all these groups by calling conferences and, as a result, the Jewish Fighting Organisation ŻOB (Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa) was established.

Mojtek Zylberberg became the leader of the combat organisation and the one who set the tone for it, issuing orders on all matters. The tasks were colossal and he carried out everything with an iron will. [The tasks were]:

- connections with the existing ghettos, including that of Warsaw;
- connections with the AL [Armia Ludowa];
- production of munitions;
- organising forest partisan detachments and combat units – the so-called "fives";
- armed operations on smaller and larger scales;
- building underground tunnels;
- training the members to handle weapons, and

- imposing a forced taxation on the wealthier population in the "Small Ghetto" – and, if someone refused to pay the tax, he was arrested and imprisoned in the underground movement's detention bunker.

[And] besides the general struggle against the Nazi powers-that-be, he also waged a war on the Jewish provocateurs and denouncers.

During the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", Mojtek Zylberberg stood his ground heroically, holding an automatic in each hand and shooting incessantly at the Nazi tyrants. He fell heroically on the battleground, with glory and dignity.

The name Mojtek Zylberberg has grown into a symbol of the fight for freedom, being set down in history as a hero and martyr of the Częstochowa resistance movement.

## Rywka Glanc

Rywka Glanc was born, in 1917, in a small shtetl in the Kielce Province. She tore away from the small-*shtetl* environment and joined the *Freiheit*<sup>2</sup> [Zionist] pioneering youth movement, [where] she was educated – and educated others – in the Zionist-Socialist spirit. Having lost her parents, she travelled off to "hachshara" [training], to prepare herself for immigration to the Land of Israel. She quickly gained notoriety for her organisational capabilities and devotion to the movement and, as a result, she was kept from travelling away, in order to lead the *kibbutzim* movement in Poland. For five years, Rywka Glanc headed the "hachshara" points and, for a long time, she was active in the Borochovo *kibbutz* in Łódź until the outbreak of the War.

She settled in Warsaw, where she actively worked along with Cywia Lubetkin, Frumka Plotnicka and others. Having an Aryan appearance, she was entrusted with the duties of courier. She travelled throughout towns and shtetls, awakening and encouraging, organising the pioneering movement and taking with her the illegal literature that was being published during wartime. On her journeys, she experienced tragic moments due to the constant searches, but always managed to wriggle out of these perilous situations thanks to her quick thinking.

In 1941, the *Arbeiterrat* organised *kibbutzim* in Częstochowa. The Ha'Chalutz Central in Warsaw delegated Rywka Glanc to be in charge of the *Dror kibbutz*. Upon arriving in Częstochowa, she became the one who set the tone of the activities in the *kibbutz*, awakening towards her the warmest sympathies from all the members for her comradely conduct, her guileless manner and, especially, due to her dedicated work for the *kibbutz's* interests. She also put herself in close contact with the *Arbeiterrat*, which she viewed as the workforce's greatest communal power, and the only one who helped solve the *kibbutz's* day-to-day problems. Upon the request of the

<sup>1</sup> [TN: According to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. II, col. 74, this group was led by Lajzer Geller.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: "Freedom"; this movement is often mentioned by its Hebrew name, "Dror".]

*Arbeiterrat's* leadership, she became a permanent co-worker of the secretariat.

With the start of the operations to exterminate the Jews, Rywka Glanc received a message from the Ha'Chalutz Central to organise an armed resistance movement. She called a whole series of meetings of the active figures of the League [for a Working Land of Israel] at the *kibbutz's* premises at ul. Przemysłowa 2, at which she read Cywia Lubetkin's reports about the annihilation of Jews and the call to resistance.

All these reports made an overwhelming impression on everyone, but the broader masses did not believe the information regarding the exterminations and, due to a lack of weapons, the plans were not put into action during the period of the "Big Ghetto".

During the time of the *akcje*, when a fierce hunger reigned, Rywka Glanc busied herself with procuring food for the *kibbutz*. In the resettlement *akcja* on ul. Przemysłowa, Rywka Glanc was taken away to the Treblinka transport. Thanks to his selfless efforts, Bernard Kurland managed to have her taken off the railway wagon.

Following the liquidation of the "Big Ghetto", once more, she began with a group of devoted members to organise the *kibbutz* in the building at ul. Garncarska 72, which became the centre of communal life and the underground movement and influenced the entire population of the "Small Ghetto". Rywka Glanc stood at the head of the *kibbutz* and evoked the greatest affection, admiration and trust. When she showed herself in the little alleyways of the "Small Ghetto", everyone pointed at her, "That is Rywka Glanc!" She always wore a white blouse, a leather jacket and high brown boots - she was a model of cleanliness and simple elegance.

She had a huge influence on her co-workers in the worst and most desperate of times, due to her unchanging equilibrium and tranquil manner. Her dear smile, on the outside, had an effect on everyone – even if, in the depths of her heart, she was hurting and bleeding for the tragedy of the Jewish people and roaring for revenge. She, therefore, worked day and night in order to make preparations for the definitive battle with the enemy - the Nazi forces.

At the same time, she [also] carried out the instructions of the Central in Warsaw, travelling about as an "Aryan" and transporting weapons from the Częstochowa "Small Ghetto" to the underground movement in Będzin.

During the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", she fell in battle along with an entire array of her comrades. Rywka Glanc was one of the most heroic daughters produced by the Jewish people and the pioneering movement.

## Josl Kantor

He was born in Częstochowa in 1917. When he was still a pupil, he was a member of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, where he was educated in the spirit of a pioneer and a sportsman, which was expressed in his conduct, external appearance and the way he dressed. His greatest

aspiration was to make it to the Land of Israel but, due to some mishap, his plan was not realised before the War.

When the Nazi war broke out, in the winter of 1939, he attempted to travel to the Soviet territories. However, he was unsuccessful. The Germans captured him along with hundreds of others and flung them into railway wagons, saying that they would transport them to the Soviet territories. But, in reality, everyone was beaten and taken away to Kraków. From there, he returned to Częstochowa, badly beaten and embittered. Predicting imminent destruction and doom, he turned into a raging, restless man and prepared himself and others for the tragic and heroic tomorrow.

In the period of the "Big Ghetto", he placed himself at the service of the pioneering underground movement, conducting scouting-educational activity amidst the pioneering youth.

When the "Small Ghetto" was established, he became one of the main organisers and leaders of the armed resistance movement. The friends, who had known him from before the War and from the "Big Ghetto", could not recognise him. He had reached the highest level of lust for battle and readiness to sacrifice his life for the honour of the Jewish people. On the day of the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", he fell in the battle of resistance.

## Nute Słomnicki

He was born in Częstochowa, in 1914, into a petit bourgeois family. He belonged to the *Freiheit* organisation from his earliest years, and was "*Rosh Ha'Ken*"<sup>2</sup>. He later went on to become the life force of the *Poalei Zion* Party and the *Freiheit* youth organisation. He was also a regular contributor and correspondent of YIVO (Yiddish Scientific Institute<sup>3</sup>) in Wilno.

During the period of the "Big Ghetto", he was active in the illegal pioneering movement as a member of *Ha'Chalutz*. He was elected as a member of the *Arbeiterrat* and invested a great deal of time in gathering materials on the disgraceful activity of the *Judenrat*.

Following the liquidation of the "Big Ghetto", he joined Rywka Glanc's newly-created *kibbutz*, together with his younger brother Izrael-Majer Słomnicki, who was also an active member of *Freiheit*, and he was elected to the *kibbutz's* management committee. Both brothers took an active part in organising and forming the armed combat organisation.

There was once an incident, where his younger brother was wounded while learning to shoot.

Both brothers fell in battle during the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto".

## Jechezkel Kantor

He was born in Częstochowa, in 1917, to the industrialist Lajbel Kantor, the owner of the Stradom mill and a colonial goods shop.

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Heb., "Head of the Nest", viz. leader of the cell.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Once the organisation relocated to New York City, it was given the English name "Institute for Jewish Research".]

After completing general school, he studied metalwork at the Craft School at ul. Garncarska 8-10. He became independent and opened a print workshop on I Aleja, which he later relocated to ul. Warszawska.

For many years, he was active in the "Askola" Sports Club, where he distinguished himself in football and table-tennis. He also became known as a good player in the chess club.

From his earliest youth, he belonged to the *Betar* revisionist youth organisation and stood out for his developed political sense and indomitable will and character.

As a twelve-year-old boy, when bloody events took place in the Land of Israel in 1929 and Jews in Częstochowa recited psalms, Jechezkel Kantor declared that the solution to the unrest could only come by way of an organised armed youth.

In his social life, he was noted for his humour and occupied first place in composing up-to-date political jokes. During the War, he married Miss Brzezińska.

Events in Częstochowa were unfolding at a tumultuous pace. The hail of Nazi regulations degraded Jewry to the lowest level.

Jechezkel Kantor was raging to do battle against the Nazi forces and went about with the idea of organising an armed resistance movement. During the most tragic epoch for Częstochowa Jewry, from 22nd September to 4th October 1942, when 48,000 Jews were annihilated by the Nazi regime, he lost his entire family. In the "Small Ghetto", he put into action his plan of organising a resistance group. He sought connections with the Polish underground movement, obtained weapons for himself and the group, and made contact with the officer Langewicz from the Polish underground movement. Jechezkel Kantor held several consultations with him at ul. Kucelińska 61, regarding the organisation of partisan detachments, military training, armaments and methods of combat.

Once the united Jewish Combat Organisation (ŻOB) – to which all the youth belonged, regardless of politico-ideological convictions – was established, he joined its ranks, taking an active part in all its work and operations. During the liquidation of the "Small Ghetto", he fell in armed combat as a heroic soldier on the battleground.

## Arje Mandelbaum

Born in Częstochowa in 1916. From his earliest childhood, he lived as an orphan under difficult material conditions. Nevertheless, he managed to complete the gimnazjum and, afterwards, to master the general social sciences.

In his youth, he was active in the Communist ranks and later joined the *Gordonia* pioneering youth organisation where, thanks to his innate intelligence, he became one of the most active and revered members.

In 1935, he travelled for "hachshara" to Zduńska Wola, where he held the office of *kibbutz* secretary.

In the time of the "Big Ghetto", he was an involved *Ha'Chalutz* activist and the official secretary of the *Arbeiterrat*. In the "Small Ghetto", he worked in the *kibbutz* and actively participated in organising the armed resistance.

He was captured due to some mishap and sent away with a group of other Jews to Skarżysko near Radom. He could not calm down and strove to return to the underground movement in Częstochowa. Together with Alter Szyldhaus and Berl Rudnicki, he escaped from Skarżysko. The Nazi authorities managed to catch Arje Mandelbaum, and he perished under severe torture.

Arje Mandelbaum was one of the most ideal figures that *Ha'Chalutz* and the underground movement in Częstochowa produced.

## Berl (Bolek) Gewercman

He was born in Częstochowa in 1914, the son of the haberdashery merchant Jankiel Gewercman. For many years, he was active in the movement and in the League for a Working Land of Israel.

During the "Big Ghetto" period, he was active in the illegal pioneering movement. When the "Small Ghetto" was established, he became one of the leaders of the *kibbutz* of the underground armed combat organisation. He organised and led the Częstochowa partisan group in the Koniecpol woods, distinguishing himself in an entire array of successful operations against the Nazi foes by disrupting German transports.

He belongs amongst the few individuals who survived. Following the defeat of the Nazi forces, he broke away from Diaspora life and journeyed to the Land of Israel, where he is an active combatant in the ranks of the Jewish army.

## Saddened

*Saddened is my heart, saddened.  
To the world's conscience I appealed,  
But it has remained indifferent  
To the tragedy which has happened to us.*

*I sing my sorrow in songs and poems,  
And express my desires in them.  
In vain have I prepared myself for an answer,  
As no one comprehends my lamentation and pain.*

**HASAG-Pelcery camp, November 1943**