

**WILLENBERG** (WILENBERG) Samuel Ignacy (Samek Igo) (1923-2016), assumed named "Ignacy Popow". World War II participant in the revolt in Treblinka and the Warsaw Uprising, sculptor. He was born on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1923 in Częstochowa, the son of → Perec Willenberg and Maniefa née Popow, the brother of Ita (Hala) and Tamara (Zosia), who perished in Treblinka.

Together with his parents, he lived in Częstochowa, in Opatów (from 1936) and, prior to 1939, with his mother and sisters, in Radość near Warsaw.

During the 1939 war, as a volunteer, he joined one of the divisions of the Polish Army in eastern Poland. Near Chełm, he was wounded in a skirmish with Soviet troops. He returned to Częstochowa and, later, ended up in the Opatów ghetto.

He was transported to the extermination camp in Treblinka. There, he avoided death and was sent to work in the camp's *Sonderkommando*. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1943, he took part in the uprising in the camp and, together with two hundred other prisoners, he escaped.

He hid in Rembertów, near Warsaw, and found his father who was hiding in Warsaw. In August 1944, following the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising, he joined the "Ruczaj" battalion of the Home Army (AK). He fought in Warsaw's southern suburbs. In September, he joined units of the Polish People's Army. Following the fall of the Uprising, he left the city with the civilian population. He found himself in Błonie near Warsaw and, later, was part of a partisan unit in the Puszczy Kampinowskiej [Kampinos Forest].

In 1945, he ran self-defence courses for Jewish youth and searched for Jewish children who, during the occupation, were hidden with Poles. He graduated from officer school and was commander of an airport in Tomaszów near Łódź.

In 1950, together with his wife, he left for Israel. He lived in Tel Aviv and worked as an engineer surveyor.

Following his retirement in 1993, he graduated in Fine Arts in the People's University [Program of Tel Aviv University]. He mainly created sculptures in clay and bronze. He also drew. He presented his works, depicting [Treblinka] camp scenes, in various countries, including Germany (in various cities, among them being Hamburg and Berlin), and in Poland (in 2003, in Zachęta in Warsaw, and also in Częstochowa).

In 2009, on ul. Strażacka in Częstochowa, a monument was unveiled which is dedicated to the victims of the Częstochowa ghetto. It was designed by him and Jerzy Kędziora. It stands in the place from where, in 1942, Jews from the Częstochowa ghetto were deported to the extermination camp in Treblinka.

From 1983, on more than thirty occasions, he accompanied groups of young Israelis to Poland. He took part in eight documentary films (among them, two Polish films). In 1987, the documentary film *Wspomnienie o Częstochowie* [*Memories of Częstochowa*] was released. In it, Willenberg talks about his memories of people and places.

In 1994, he regained his Polish citizenship. On several occasions, he took part, in Częstochowa, in Reunions of Częstochowa Jews. He was the author of *Bunt w Treblince* [*Revolt in Treblinka*]. In 1986, it was published in Hebrew, in 1991 in Polish and later in English, German, Spanish, French, Japanese, Czech and Dutch.

He died on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2016 in Tel Aviv.

His awards include:

- the Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari,
- the Cross of Valour (twice),
- the Gold Battle Badge of the Polish People's Army,
- the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland,
- the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and
- the Silver Cross of Merit.

He and his wife, Krystyna, had a daughter Orit, an architect, who designed the Israeli Embassy in Berlin.

M. Grynberg, *Ocaleni z XX wieku*, Wołowiec 2018, pp. 115–148; Willenberg, *Bunt w Treblince*; T. Haładyj, *Samuel Willenberg (1923–2016)*, "Gazeta Wyborcza Częstochowa" 2016 (22<sup>nd</sup> February), p. 2; A. Hreczuk, *To ja wygrałem*, "Polityka" 2017, No. 31, pp. 59, 60, 61. – "Gazeta Wyborcza Częstochowa" 2016 (24<sup>th</sup> February), p. 4 (obituary). – testimony of his wife, Krystyna Willenberg (given on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2017), materials in the ODDC collections.

**Juliusz Sętowski**