

Jew Tells of Final Nazi Liquidation Warsaw Ghetto

(Editor's note: Twenty years ago, on April 19, 1943, the Nazis began their "final liquidation" of the Warsaw ghetto. Three months earlier they had set about wiping it out but had been delayed by the first organized resistance on the part of the desperately oppressed Jews. Few Jews who fought that last despairing battle lived to tell of it. This is the story of one who did.)

By BERGMAN BORG
As Told To
United Press International
Warsaw—(UPI)—At first there were about 500,000 of us packed inside those ghetto walls. None could leave without the risk of being shot. At the end there were perhaps 60,000, and with few exceptions they died, too, in gas chambers.

Twenty years later it is not in me to bring it all back. But I will tell you the facts.

In the beginning, the Nazis divided the area into two sections, the ghetto proper and an industrial section. German firms ran the work programs. I worked as a tailor making uniforms for the German army. The work was compulsory and brought no privileges. It was work, when ordered, or be shot.

The official food ration for each Jew was about three loaves of bread, some potatoes, turnips and jam each



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month. As time went on people died by the hundreds of hunger and disease.

One day a public notice appeared saying we would all be leaving the ghetto. The notice promised us we would be moved to some better place.

Many Volunteer

At first some people believed it and many volunteered to be the first to move. Those who showed reluctance were caught by police on the streets and forced into trucks that rumbled out of the ghetto.

About 10,000 persons were forced each day from their families—husbands from their wives and mothers from their children.

A few weeks after the first truck left, we learned where they went—to the gas chambers of the extermination camp in the forest of Treblinka.

Go on Trucks

I have reason to remember where they went. My wife, my son and my father died there. On Aug. 20, 1942, I came home from my work and they were not there. They had gone on the trucks. I never saw them again.

SS Chief Heinrich Himmler paid a personal visit to the ghetto early in January, 1943, and reprimanded his local lieutenant, SS Brigade Fuehrer Juergen Stroop, for foot-dragging in the extermination program. About 70,000 Jews still remained in the ghetto and Himmler wanted them "resettled" at once. Stroop, according to captured documents, told Himmler that the German army, reeling from the loss of Stalingrad, had monopolized most means of transportation. But he promised "special action."

Enters Ghetto

Such was the situation when a Jew named Josphat Lewartowski appeared in the ghetto. He brought word that the Polish Workers' party (Communist) had been founded and that he was its central committee's emissary. I had been a Communist before the war and after Lewartowski's coming I helped begin organizing groups of four or five to fight by means of sabotage. We organized political instruction and military training. Lewartowski's role came to an end when one day he

was pushed onto one of the Treblinka-bound trucks, but there were others to take his place.

The Communists were not the only secret resistance group in the ghetto. There were many others, and we decided we had to unify in order to fight. We set up the "Jewish Fighting Organization" under the command of Mortheim Anielewicz.

Store Arms

We began storing arms and ammunition. We bought some from Poles outside the ghetto, including Polish policemen. And some from German soldiers. We also got arms from the Polish Workers party. We ambushed Nazi SS patrols for their arms. We made bombs out of tin boxes and bottles. We dug bunkers, and honey-

combed the ghetto with tunnels from one house to another.

On Jan. 18, 1943, a large group of SS men entered the ghetto to finish the job of liquidation. For the first time they faced organized resistance and for three days fighting went on. The Germans finally retreated because of heavy losses. But many of us had been killed or wounded, too.

Come Back

We knew they would come back—and better prepared next time. We organized into larger units stationed in vacant ghetto houses. We increased patrols. We watched and waited.

Stroop, the brigade fuhrer, sent 2,000 of his crack SS forces into the ghetto. They

meanwhile fighting broke out in other streets. Before it was over everyone fought, including women and small children. Those who had no guns or bombs were throwing stones. From buildings women poured boiling water on charging Nazi soldiers.

Three days went by and Himmler became furious at Stroop's delay in finishing the action. Stroop reported how Jewish women were firing pistols with both hands and hiding grenades in their blouses. On the fifth day Himmler ordered "the greatest severity" and Stroop decided to burn down the whole ghetto.

The SS troops began burning the ghetto houses one by one, using flamethrowers. We fought on, but we could not stop the flames.

Houses Burn

It became difficult to escape from the burning houses. The pavement got so hot it burned the feet and set our clothes afire. Countless people jumped to death from upper floors of their buildings, choosing such a death in preference to being burned alive.

In his reports, Nazi Brigadier Stroop reported on the jumpers. "With their bones broken, they still tried to crawl across the street into buildings which had not yet been set on fire. The Jews and bandits often preferred to return into the flames than risk being caught by us..."

The survivors of my unit withdrew to the bunker in Leszno street. Several days 14 of us stayed there feeling the heat of the burning house over our heads. But we still managed to keep up some firing from the rubble.

Stroop reported to Himmler "More blocks of buildings were burned down. This is the only and final method which forces this trash and subhumanity to the surface."

Try Drowning

The enemy saw us shooting from the Leszno street bunker. They had tried fire. Now they used water, trying to drown us. They pumped water into our cellar bunker for three days.

Luckily we had good drainage. Somehow it still was working. It saved our lives. On May 8 Anielewicz and his command post in Milla street was wiped out. We knew that meant the end.

Those of us in Leszno street waited some time and then took an underground passage under the wall. But as soon as we emerged, waiting Germans seized us. We were tak-

ing back to the ghetto and then sent on trucks to Treblinka.

Final resistance ended about a week later. Stroop titled his final report "The Warsaw

Ghetto Is No More." He was hanged after the war on the site of the ghetto. Borg, now 56, ended the war at the extermination camp, from which he was liberated.

Instead of being gassed, I was picked among a very few from the ghetto for a work gang. I was still strong enough to work, and that is why I am alive.

The Family Council

Editor's note: The Family Council consists of a judge, a psychiatrist, three clergymen, three editors and a women's editor. Each article is a summary of a family disagreement presented to the Council. The Council deals with problems, major and minor, encountered by guidance counselors and social workers. Edited by Mrs. Alma Denny. (Copyright by General Features Corp.)

Marie W. — She should let him come to New York alone. Elaine A. — I wouldn't dream of letting him travel alone.

Marie W. — My brother lives in Florida and I live in New York with our parents. We'd counted on a visit from him and his family at Eastertide because their 12-year-old son whom we haven't seen for two years had a 10-day vacation. His parents make several trips north a year on business. Well, we were sadly disappointed because Chippy went on a Scout encampment instead. We've asked him up for 2 weeks when school lets out. He can travel alone. Lots of kids do.

Elaine A. — I don't care what other kids do. I know my son, and I'm not putting him on a bus, as Marie suggests, to go to New York alone. And we can't make another trip to bring him so soon after this one. It's hard to make our plans coincide with his vacations. Chippy loves New York and really wants to accept his grandparents' standing invitation. But he'd have to be at least 18 before we'd consider letting him travel alone. He'd

lose his money or his way.

The Council: Let's hope the Scout toughening program can win out with Chippy over his mother's swaddling closeness. She's far behind in her duty of preparing her son to take full responsibility for his social behavior, by age 16 when a lapful of new rights and privileges descends upon him. A child psychiatrist, Dr. Jerome L. Schulman, claims that a normal time-table would have a boy of 9 making 50 per cent of all decisions affecting his daily life — such as how much milk to drink, what to wear, how to handle his allowance, when to do homework. If Elaine had been setting the proper groundwork for self-sufficiency, Chippy might now — even at 12 — be ready to try a solo trip with enough poise and self-possession not to get lost or even flustered. We don't approve of pushing a child. But neither can we condone "ploughing under" what's ready to grow. How many would-be oaks are metamorphosed by over-protective parents into hothouse plants?

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