

WARSAW GHETTO LECTURE

Rabbi Fred Guttman

1st PARAGRAPH OF ZIVIAH LUBETKIN account - "The Ghetto was Burning"

"The ghetto was burning. For days and nights it flamed, and the fire consumed house after house, entire streets. Columns of smoke rose, sparks flew, and the sky reflected a red, frightening glow. Nearby, on the other side of the wall, citizens of the capital strolled, played and enjoyed themselves. They knew that the 'Jews were burning.' The wind blew smoke and soot from the burning ruins in their direction. Sparks scattered and now and then a house outside the ghetto would catch fire. But these flames were immediately extinguished. Only in the ghetto, no one hastened to put out the flames, to come to the rescue. Everything was burning and there was no one to halt the blaze."

Thus began the final tragic chapter of the Warsaw Ghetto, a ghetto like others in some respects, yet set aside from other Jewish ghettos by the story of heroism which marked its end.

You see - Ghettos played an important part in the Nazi destruction process.

From ghettos - Nazis reaped 3 benefits

1. Isolation and concentration for purposes of deportation.
2. Ghetto itself serves as an instrument of mass murder through starvation and disease.
3. Ideological function - We were sub-human - We survive only as parasites.

What better way to prove these than to crowd Jews into a ghetto and dehumanize us.

Once Jews reduced to level of animals Nazis could point at us and say "We are right. The Jews are sub-humans."

In pre-war Poland, there were 380,000 Jews in Warsaw - 20% of the population

Once the Nazis conquer Poland, the persecution of the Jewish community begins.

In the latter part of the summer of 1941, the Jewish community under orders from the Nazi occupiers begin to wall itself in.

October 16, 1940 -Nazis issue a decree telling Jews to move into Ghetto (120,000 Jews) and Poles to move out (80,000 Poles)

November 15, 1940 -All exits to the Ghetto were cut off. The excuse was that it as a quarantine measure against disease.

Large signs posted - Danger Epidemic Zone

And thus the Warsaw Ghetto was created

It consisted of two sections -

A large Ghetto &

a small Ghetto

Bridge over Chlodna Street - major highway out of Warsaw

Emanuel Ringelblum -the famous historian of the Warsaw Ghetto wrote "We are returning to the Middle Ages."

Actually - The situation was much worse

In the Middle Ages, Ghetto

- a. defended us from attack by the mob
- b. easy access to synagogue
- c. was not a prison - Jews could leave by day & do business

By contrast -

The Nazi Ghetto was a hellish prison. A prison full of

1. disease & starvation
2. forced labor
3. death

In the Warsaw Ghetto, everyone felt the loss of human rights & freedom

At first for some it was things like

1. telephones removed
2. mail censored and controlled
3. no parks or plants
4. oldest part of town - run-down

Three major things everyone felt:

1. Overcrowded conditions*

By the time the Ghetto was walled in, 20% of the population was living in

100 acres = 3% of Warsaw's land

6 people per room

Eventually the Nazis force another 100,000 Jews into the Ghetto and this ratio grows even greater

One girl in Warsaw wrote:

"My ears are filled with the deafening clamor of crowded streets and the cries of people dying on the sidewalks. Even the quiet hours of the night are filled with the snoring and coughing of those who share the same apartment or, only too often, with the shots and screams which come from the streets."

2. There was very little coal to be had for heating
Coal referred to as black pearls, pipes burst and seage becomes very problematic

Ringelblum -

"The most powerful sight is that of freezing children dumbly weeping in the streets with bare feet, bare knees and torn clothing."

Most of all, we felt:

3. Hunger
The Nazis figured that in the Ghetto we would starve to death.
According to the Nazi commander in Poland, the Jews of Warsaw received only 180 calories per day.

Accordingly, the Nazi goal of exterminating us through starvation should have been accomplished in a matter of months.

And in the 1st year of the Ghetto, from the summer of 1940 to summer of 1941, 80,000 of us will die of starvation and disease.

Hunger hits everyone
Potatoes become like gold

Yet, hunger not only kills, it disables.

Fatigue	
Dizziness	These were
Nausea	all
Vomiting	too common
Diarrhea	

Disease -
Kills many of these 80,000 especially among infant and the elderly

Why didn't more of us die in that year?

Three reasons

1. We came to terms with the situation.

Jews innovate to survive

Smuggle in food

Smugglers were

a) Children. Children less than 12 years old did not have to wear badge

b) People who worked outside in factories

c) Hevra Kaddisha - people buried outside the Ghetto - Point out cemetery. Once a cow was smuggled back into the ghetto in a hearse coming back from the cemetery.

To eat was to resist

We come to terms with the situation by trying to do everything possible to prevent disease

Germans had expected epidemics,

But

Jewish doctors and nurses become heroes in Warsaw Ghetto.

A vast network of medical services is established.

Typhus which at that time would usually kill 25% of population only kills 15% in Warsaw.

2. Family Life - a second reason why more of us did not die

Extended families are taken in

Marriages continue

Divorces cease

3. We do everything we can to keep despair away.

Low rate of suicide in Warsaw Ghetto.

Jews of Warsaw sing:

"Listen here Haman

Jews will settle scores

You will get yours

Jews have lived and will endure - 0

But you Haman, you will go straight to Hell."

Yes:

We survive that hellish year because we decided that our existence as a people will not be destroyed. Individuals may be destroyed but the Jewish community will live on.

THE JUDENRAT

Officially, the head of the Jewish community was the Judenrat
The Official Community - The Judenrat

Judenrat = Jewish Councils

Two Roles

- A. to meet German demands - example had to supply forced labor
- B. to serve Jewish needs
 - 1. Feed the hungry
 - 2. heal the sick

How?

Organize:

- 1. Public kitchens
- 2. Hospitals
- 3. Orphanages (Korchak)
- 4. Jewish industry (if Jews are productive they won't kill us)

Represented Jews

- 1. Petitions to Nazis
- 2. Bribery

Jewish Police

Jewish Police - different breed - out to save themselves

But

After a while the Judenrat becomes completely disrupted

Why?

- 1. Too much representation of German needs - "Nazi tool"
- 2. Too much internal fraud

Therefore, new organizations arise to challenge the Judenrats authority (go to alternative community)

The Alternative Communities - Voluntary organizations

Despite the attempt of the Germans to dehumanize us, we insisted on maintaining some sort of semblance of organized society & culture.

Why?

Represents spiritual resistance

Despite it all

Jews try to provide themselves with art; literature; education and religion

1. Synagogues
2. Social Welfare Agency
3. Youth Centers

These were all voluntary and self supporting

Established solely for raising the level of Jewish life.

Social Welfare Agency Center

- a) food
- b) children
- c) other forms of social services

Branches

By 1942 - 412 Branches in Warsaw

Young people like you provided the backbone for this agency

How?

1. cared for children
2. collections - example - the poor people were asked to contribute a spoonful of flour or sugar toward a general collection to help those who were still poorer
3. organized entertainment
4. Warned tenants about the arrival of the Jewish police or the SS

These branches or committees of the Jewish Social Welfare agency gained people's trust, protected them and becomes of opposition to the Judenrat.

Religious Life

Many synagogues, yeshivot,, courts

Even though the observance of Judaism was outlawed - 600 secret minyanim in Warsaw

Prayer

Passages written during the crusades recited everyday. Not just on Tisha b.AV

Why?

- They expressed immediate daily concerns
- Observance of Kashrut ceases, too difficult
- Seders - beet juice instead of wine
- Shabbat - impossible - Jews forced to work

Education & Culture

Jewish schools closed

But Jews continued to study in secret

Card playing was popular

Acting

Music

All these to help forget our terror

Dance

Jokes

Cultural Societies - offered courses and lectures

Secret archives - Oneg Shabbat

- Emanuel Ringelblum records life and history of Warsaw Ghetto

In such a way, the Jews of Warsaw won a spiritual victory over the Nazis

Amid terror, starvation and disease, they helped to hold on to humanity and enrich Jewishness

There was, however, one other unofficial community, The Counter Community

The Counter Community - The Political Underground

Jewish political parties exist prior to 1939 - but this system was for the most part shattered by the Nazis

Political Parties were outlawed

- Have to go underground
- Socialist groups
- Zionist groups

Both carry on underground activities + an underground press (girls smuggle info out)

Warsaw - late Friday Night - April 17, 1942

50 Jews seized in their homes by the Gestapo and shot on the street.

Became known as "Bloody Friday"

Most of those murdered were associated with the underground press.

Eventually it is from these underground political movements that armed resistance will be organized

Refused to be led like sheep to slaughter

Jewish combat organization (ZOB) formed in Warsaw in October 1942

Later on Betar organization formed - Jewish Military Alliance

Strategy

How do you acquire weapons where and when to fight?

By the end of 1942, horrifying news of mass deportations reaches Warsaw

Underground press carries these stories on 3rd or 4th page

Why?

Too hard to believe

1st page items were world military developments

By the spring of 1942 -

The Ghetto is on the verge of disaster

Jews are nervous - Near Panic

Everyone had heard of mass deportations

Some Jews had come back with the most horrifying tales

And the deadly chronology began

May 4th - Nazis demand lists of all workers

Panic in the Ghetto

July 18th - 40 freight cars arrive at the R.R. Station - Umshagplatz

Once again panic

July 19th - Himmlers resettlement order - All Jews in Poland to be destroyed by December 31, 1942

July 20th - Adam Czerniakow assured by German official that deportations would not take place

July 21st - Czernikow and wife are taken hostage
Czernikow told - 6,000 Jews a day or we kill your wife - Chooses suicide
[MEMORIAL TO HIM IN THE GHETTO]

July 22nd - EREV TISHA B' AV
Deportations begin
5,000 - 6,000 Jews a day to Treblinka

From July 22, 1942 til October, no coordination among resistance groups

Why?

1. The extent of exemptions anesthetize our will to resist.
The individual strove to acquire and keep his protective scrap of paper as if it had some permanent value.
2. People were waiting for the Judenrat to do something.

Yet -

By the end of July, we observed that the same wagon numbers returned on trains to the Umshagplatz after 12-14 hours.

Still -

The majority of the people oppose resistance.

Why?

- * Felt it would jeopardize the safety of the entire community.
- * People who came voluntarily would receive bread and food.

By September - 10,000 Jews a day are being deported.

By R.H. only 60,000 Jews remain. 310,000 had been deported

By this time the Ghetto is merely a collection of abandoned and destroyed buildings with people living here and the streets strewn with dead bodies

Size of Ghetto after Great Deportation

People live in three main areas or sub-ghettos

1. The Central Ghetto
2. The Brush Factory District Ghetto
3. The Shop District Ghetto

People were allowed to continue working in the Provsta Street Ghetto area

September 20 1942 - Underground Paper "On Guard" -Lead article - "The Annihilation of Warsaw Jews"

"Today every Jew should know the fate of those resettled. The same fate awaits the remaining few left in Warsaw. The conclusion then is: Don't let yourself be caught!" Hide, don't let yourself be taken away, run away, don't be fooled by registrations, selections, numbers and roll calls. Jews! Help one another. Take care of the children. Help the Illegals. The dishonorable fractions and helpers - the Jewish police - should be boycotted! Don't believe them, beware of them. Stand up against them.

We are all soldiers on a terrible front.

We must survive so that we can demand a reckoning for the tortured brothers and sisters, children and parents. who were killed by the murderers herd on the battlefield for freedom and humanity!

The report came too late for the 300,000+ Jews of Warsaw already deported.

But

It heralded the resistance to come.

In Warsaw by September 1942, the Underground had substituted for the Judenrat, October 20 - Jews finally coordinated their defense - 1st operation Lejkin head of Jewish Police assassinated

Many Jews hide

November 1942. Germans offer amnesty, food & employment to those who come forward & reveal hideouts.

Jewish Fighting Organization + Jewish Military Alliance combats Nazis with the press and the gun

START HERE

January 18, 1943 - German troops surround Ghetto - takes JFO by surprise - sets up headquarters at #10 SS Command Center

Nevertheless, JFO counterattacks near Umshagplatz

50 Germans killed or wounded

Only a few Jews deported

JFO suffers heavy losses, but then bold resistance inspires the Ghetto

Proof that the Germans could be beaten

Resistance gains support of the community

February 1940 - 5 Jewish police shot

Organizes into 22 units

Weapons were extremely scarce - 61 guns in 7 months (point out guns IN MUSEUM)

But morale was high

On January 21, Warsaw Jews send the following secret radio message

"We notify you of the greatest crime of all times, about the murder of millions of Jews in Poland. Poised at the brink of annihilation of the still surviving Jews, we ask you :

1. Revenge against the Germans
2. Force the Hitlerites to halt the murders
3. Fight for our lives and our honor
4. Contact neutral countries
5. Rescue 10,000 children through exchange
6. \$500,000 purposes of aid

Brothers - The remaining Jews in Poland live with the awareness that in the most terrible days of our history, you did not come to our aid.

Respond, at least in the last days of our life."

What was the result of the Revolt of January 18, 1943?

Deportations stop for 3 months

Meanwhile

The Germans & the Jews prepare for Battle

Who were these Jewish fighters?

Young people

Leader was Mordecai Anielewicz - 23 years old

Most had been members of Zionist Youth Group

Mordecai had decided that the question is not whether or not we will

die.

In his view everyone will die

For him the question is "How shall we die?"

He answered: We have decided to die in Battle.

And therefore, during those months after January 18, Mordecai

Anielewicz

1. Organizes his fighters
2. Tries to smuggle in more arms
3. Makes homemade grenades
4. Dug secret bunkers and tunnels
5. sets up tank traps

To a friend Mordecai Anielewicz writes:

"We don't have a moments rest. We sleep in our clothes. At every entry to the Ghetto we stand guard day and night. We are making final preparations. Soon we shall have to separate ourselves from life and go to the place that no one wants to go. But ours is the correct path, for we have cultivated in our hearts the idea of revolt."

April 17 - Major General Jurgen von Stroup arrives in Warsaw to coordinate the German attack

April 19 - The eve of Passover - the Battle begins

The Germans attack using howitzers, machine guns, tanks, armored vehicles

At every place they attack they are met by fierce Jewish resistance

By 5:00 p.m. the Germans, surprised and shocked by resistance, withdraw with 200 dead and wounded.

That night, there was joy in the Ghetto

One survivor later recounted:

"We were happy and laughing. When we threw our grenades and saw German blood on the streets of Warsaw, which had been flood with so much Jewish blood and tears. A great joy possessed us."

They all knew they would lose.
Nevertheless, the Jews now embraced and kissed one another

That night, a seder was celebrated amid gunfire.

Imagine the reading of the Haggadah on that night.

The Jews continue to fight.

The Germans continue their attack the next day.

On the fourth day, Stroup observes:

"Over and over again, we observed that Jews and bandits, despite the danger of being burned alive, preferred to return to the flames rather than be caught by us."

On the sixth day of the fight the Nazis had captured 25,000 Jews, but had taken heavy casualties.

The Germans continued to comb out Jews, setting fire to buildings and throwing poison gas into sewers and bunkers.

On May 8, Mila 18 #26 - The headquarters of the Jewish Fighters, the command post of Mordecai Anielewicz is captured.

The fighters inside choose kiddush Ha-shem rather than surrender.

May 16th - The synagogue only thing that remains

Sniper fire from Jews continued from Jewish quarters throughout most of the summer

What was left when it was over?

A smoking wilderness, blood soaked debris of Yiddish and Hebrew books were all that remained of 1000 year old civilization of Jews in Poland.

42 days after the revolt, the Nazis announce:

"The former Jewish Quarter in Warsaw is no longer in existence."

What can be said of the revolt?

1. 100's of German soldiers killed in revenge.
2. Polish population sees that the Germans were vulnerable. This encourage resistance.

3. The revolt had held out against the Nazis longer than the Poles when Germany attacked Poland.

4. New image of the Jew in the eyes of the non-Jew no longer perceived as spineless creatures.

5. New Jewish self image. The 1st national military struggle of the Jewish people since the Bar Kochba revolt had occurred. After 1808 year Jews were again fighting back.

The revolt encourages other revolts among Jews.

Perhaps the best comment on the revolt was made by its leader Mordecai Anielewicz. {READ AT MILA 18}

"I cannot describe the conditions in which the Jews of the ghetto are now "living." Only a few exceptional individuals will be able to survive such suffering. The others will sooner or later die. Their fate is certain, even though thousands are trying to hide in cracks and rat holes. It is impossible to light a candle, for lack of air. Greetings to you who are outside. Perhaps a miracle will occur and we shall see each other again one of these days. It is extremely doubtful.

The last wish of my life has been fulfilled. Jewish self-defense has become a fact. Jewish resistance and revenge have become actualities. I am happy to have been one of the first Jewish fighters in the ghetto.

Where will rescue come from?

Mordecai Anielewicz"
During the Revolt, 1943
Warsaw

Where will rescue come from?

For Mordecai Anielewicz and his comrades it never came.

50 Jews, however, do manage to escape through the sewers.

Spend 48 hours in Sewers, Get out near Prosvt Street, hijack truck, go to forest and joins partisans

Stress effect on other Ghettos and camps (to Treblinka)

The partisans continue the fight.

PERHAPS TEACH PARTISAN'S SONG

Let's learn their song and sing it with a pride benefitting the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto revolt.

TREBLINKA LECTURE

by Rabbi Fred Guttman

If Warsaw Ghetto was Hell on Earth, Treblinka was a different PLANET."

I. TREBLINKA

Small practically unknown town until WWII

Basically was a small RR station located 62 miles from Warsaw

No one would have ever heard of it had we not been taken there.

The site was located on a side spur some 2-1/2 miles from the station.

TREBLINKA refers to two camps

Treblinka I -

Jews & Poles

Concentration camp set up shortly after Germany occupied Poland -
December 1941

Penal & Slave labor camp

Poles there for political offenses mostly

Many survive the war

Jews (How did we get there?)

We were told that we were going to be resettled in the East

Most of us who were in Treblinka I die

We die of hunger, overwork, and brutal beatings or gassing

Treblinka I - operates until July 1944

10,000 people come to Treblinka I

7,000 die - 6,500 were Jews

What was life like in Treblinka I?

Hard work - very little food & clothing, often very cold

Commander Von Eupen

Favorite sport - Horseback riding
Loved to Jump Jewish children - place in rows - how far can the horse jump

Another Commander - Hans Heinbuch

A teacher, university graduate - Educated and cultured man
Once took 30 of our children who had recently arrived from Warsaw for entertainment and to music - 12 SS men smash their heads with axes

As bad as Treblinka I was, it was nothing at all compared to Treblinka II.

Treblinka II - compared to Treblinka II, Treblinka I was a heaven on earth

About 32 acres

Camouflaged by a pine forest

Here the SS men would take leisurely strolls when off duty

Train arrives in Treblinka -

Train pulls to a stop

Out of small windows - one of us sees a train station - Signs on

it - East bound trains etc.

This unloading platform was camouflaged as an ordinary RR station

Flower baskets hang from the roof -

Signs "Station Master," "Tickets"

On the other side of the car, we saw an electric fence and watch towers

After a few minutes the doors of the cars opened.

The cars opened.

60 cars, but only 20 at a time could fit on the platform. The process therefore had to be repeated three times of the average train. Approximately 100 per car.

We breathe fresh air - we made it.

But then we hear harsh shouts

A horde of Ukrainians and Germans rush at us saying,

"This is the Hoellenspektakel - The Inferno Show"

"Juden Rouse"

Juden Rouse - Jews get out

Macht Schnell (2X) go quickly

To encourage us to go quickly, they beat us with pipes & clubs

Women to the left!!
Men to the right!!
Families separated without saying farewells
Everyone undress!!
While we undress we are being beaten
We take our clothes to a large (Jewish attitude towards modesty)
pile to be sorted with other valuables as well.
The guards gave us strings to tie our shoes into pairs

What did this make us think?
That we would get them back.
From here the women would be led to the barber where their hair
would be cut - shaved to the skin
We stand there waiting for the barber to finish - without clothes, cold
(winter 20-30 degrees below) - Afraid
Children eyes wide with fear and wonder - seem to silently ask:
"What is all this? What is it for?"
One by one the women emerge
Then we meet two Ukrainian Guards Ivan & Nicholai
They are the "bath masters"
Ivan: beats us sadistically - joking & laughing all the time
Nicholai: looked as though he was spiritually possessed

After beating us - they handed out pieces of stone made to look like
soap -
Music played by prisoners.

Why?

To deceive us
Then naked and barefoot we stood in a row, Ready for the "chase"
Before us a 150 yard path which the Germans referred to as

"The Himmelstrasse" - "Way to heaven."

Once we start walking - Guards yell, scream & beat as with whips &
pricked us with bayonets

Now we run.
Macht Schnell - Go quickly -

Big German shephard - "Barry" comes toward us

Excited by our cries, the dog would tear at our flesh (he had been trained to go for the upper thigh)

And so we ran

Why?

Perhaps the Nazis figured that if we arrived there out of breath that the effect of the gas would be hastened and the time of the agony shortened.

And so we ran

To the building with the Jewish star

Why a star?

Perhaps to comfort us

But also

Ivan points to star and says

state "Jews - you wanted a Jewish state, a Judenstaadt. Well here is your and there is your star."

The building - "Der Judenstaadt" - consisted of 10 gas chambers - 5 delousing chambers on each side.

Each chamber measured 25 meters square and about 6'2" high - showers & tiles on inside

On the outside of each chamber there was a Russian tank engine - diesel powered.

You see

Treblinka was a primitive camp.

Did not use Zyklon B

The exhaust from the engines was hooked up to the air-intake of each chamber

Meanwhile

Having run down "Himmelstrasse," We continued to run straight into the gas chamber itself

400-500 of us in each chamber

The motor was connected and switched on.

Within 25 minutes, all of us lay dead.

I say this with a euphemistically for:

We really did not die

We all died standing
Legs a& arms entangled
Mothers embracing children
no friend, no foe
No rich, no beautiful, no ugly
There we stood, pressing against each other.
Eyes bulging
Bathed in perspiration and defecation. Blood oozes down our noses
and mouths
All equal
All yellowed by the gas

And so it was
On a "good" day - 1,000's of us would be killed

But what about a "not good" day?
The tank engines were old and frequently functioned poorly or not at all.
Of course, if they functioned poorly it would mean that we would suffocate more slowly, with more pain.

As a matter of fact,
Ivan used to brag that sometimes he would merely idle the engine in order to prolong our deaths.
If there were any of us still alive when it was over, we would be quickly dispatched by means of a rifle butt, a bullet or a vigorous kick to the head.

Sometimes
We were left in the chambers all night without the motor being turned on.
Usually by morning most of us were dead, having died from the pressure and confinement.
The only ones to survive this were usually our younger brothers and sisters who seemed to have more endurance.
However, the German revolver soon took care of them.

Treblinka II - Staff
Consisted of 30 SS men, 200 Ukrainians, 700-1000 Jewish workers -
Sondercommando - 1/3 monthly turnover
After the "bath masters" open the doors, the Sondercommando -
Jewish slave prisoners - would pull out our bodies.

The first bodies had to be pulled with hooks but after that we fell in heaps.

These Jews would take their brothers and sisters to a building where SS guards acted as dentists and ripped out gold fillings

After this,

Another group of specialists checks to see whether there are any jewelry, diamonds hidden in our rectums or in the women's vaginas.

Then:

The Jews in the Sonder Commando would carry us over to a big pit They placed us into these pits, head to feet, feet to head - the "sardine method," in order to put in the maximum number.

The Ukrainians would be beating the Sondercommando all of the time.

Firing shots.

If any of us protested at having to bury our brothers and sisters, having to stand in a pit of blood, pus and stench, we would be immediately taken to and there we would be shot in the back of the neck and our bodies would fall into the ditch.

Many of us got sick and were wounded from the blows.

Those of us in this category were taken to the "sick rooms" where we were murdered separately.

having The nighttime activity for the Ukrainians often consisted of forcibly sex with Jewish women

The Camp Commandant, Franz Stangl lived and worked in a building close to the forest

Once in this area, the Commandant of Treblinka gave a banquet in honor of the visiting commandant of Belzec, another extermination camp.

During the banquet Professor Doctor (a Prof. of Hygiene at a German Univ) Fanneusteil made a speech.

During the speech he said,

"Your work is great work and a very useful and very necessary duty.

Treblinka is a kindness and humanitarian enterprise. When one sees the bodies of the Jews, one understands the greatness of your work."

And so,

We ran to our deaths

Dehumanized

Yet some of us cried, "Down with Hitler!"

Why?

A last act of defiance

Spiritual resistance

and

Most stories of resistance are buried with the ashes of our brothers and sisters who perished.

Yet, not only at Treblinka, but at every concentration camp, there were acts of resistance.

What were some of these acts of resistance?

1. Train pulls in - a young man is prevented from saying good-bye to his mother. Goes over to a Ukrainian and stabs him with a pen-knife. As punishment, all the men who arrived on the transport were shot.

2. Argentinean Jewish visitor in Warsaw when war breaks out kills an SS man with a knife.

3. Group of men from Grodno refuse to undress. Shot by automatic rifles.

4. Men refuse to leave transport. All taken to the pit and shot.

5. A man told to separate from his wife. Wanted to say good-bye. Not allowed. Beats his fists against the guards.

6. Once - women were running naked on the Himmelstrasse. A 17 year old girl grabs a machine gun and kills 12 Nazis.

7. Meir Berliner - On September 11, 1942, Meir Berliner stabbed Unterscharführer Max Bialas to death with a penknife during evening roll-call.

At the evening roll-call of the prisoners, Max Bialas instructed those who had arrived that same day to line up on the side. It was not clear who was to be liquidated — the new arrivals or those who had arrived earlier. At that moment Berliner jumped out from the ranks of the prisoners, lurched toward Bialas and stabbed him with a knife. A great commotion followed. The Ukrainian guards opened fire. Berliner was killed on the spot. and in the course of the shooting more than ten other prisoners were killed and others were wounded. When the tumult

subsided the prisoners were lined up again for roll-call. Christian Wirth, who was in Treblinka at the time, arrived on the scene accompanied by Kurt Franz, the second in command of the camp. Ten men were removed from the ranks and shot on the spot in full view of all the others. On the following day, during the morning roll-call, another 150 men were taken out, brought to the Lazarett [the so-called “hospital” which was in fact an execution site] and shot there.

Little is known about Berliner.

According to the testimony of fellow-inmate Abraham Krzepicki, he was a middle-aged Jewish citizen of Argentina who had lived in that country for many years.

He and his wife and young daughter traveled to Poland on vacation in the summer of 1939. They could have picked a better time: when Germany invaded on September 1, 1939, the Berliners were unable to return home. Their Argentine passports should have protected them, but they ended up in the Warsaw Ghetto and were transported to Treblinka. Berliner’s wife and child were gassed immediately, but he was spared to work.

This reprieve would be expected to last days, or a few weeks at the most before he too would go to the gas chamber. Berliner became consumed with rage and the thirst for revenge, supposedly saying, “When the oppressors give me two choices, I always take the third.”

And so he took the first opportunity he could to kill one of his tormentors. As Yitzhak Arad said in his book *Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka: The Operation Reinhard Death Camps**: “His was an individual act of heroism and despair.”

As he must have known he would, Berliner died a horrible death — according to Krzepicki, he was beaten to death with a shovel.

171 Jews killed by the Nazis in response. Realization that individual acts of resistance could really backfire.

Ironically, following Bialas’s murder, conditions for prisoners at Treblinka actually improved.

This was strictly for pragmatic reasons, as Arad noted: “The Jews selected for temporary work were a danger to the Germans, and the Berliner incident had proved it ... When people knew they had nothing to lose, an act of despair like that of Meir Berliner could happen again and again.”

Rather than constantly killing and replacing their workers, the Nazis in charge of the camp decided to create a permanent staff of prisoner-workers and treat them with relative humanity. In this way, they hoped to prevent further acts of suicidal violence on the part of the Jews.

The existence of a permanent cadre of workers made it possible to plan and organize a revolt and mass escape from the camp. In August 1943, after months of conspiring and gathering the necessary weapons, the inmates killed most of the guards and made a run for it. About 300 or so actually made it outside of camp; of those, approximately 60 would survive the war.

Do you think that they did these things to save their own lives?

Answer: No! They were doing this for revenge

Eventually,

Jewish Encouraged by the heroism of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising - The
 prisoners organize and began to plan how to destroy Treblinka.

takes One of the prisoners, a Jewish locksmith repairs lock on the arsenal,
 imprint of the key
 4 months later another key and entry

The revolt on August 2, 1943 -

Dr. Julian Chorzicki was the first to organize people from the Sondercommando groups. He saw to bribe Ukrainian guards with gold and silver which had been hidden by the Goldjuden. The Goldjuden ("gold Jews") were prisoners primarily Jews who were responsible for collecting and sorting gold, jewels, money, and other valuables that reached the undressing room were called "golden Jews." Chorzicki was killed before the revolt.

In addition, the Jews attempted to steal weapons. At one time, a Jewish locksmith was called upon to replace the key to the armory. He made a duplicate key.

As the number of Jews being deported declined, the Jews in Camp three where the needs gas chambers were wanted to revolt before they were sent to the chamber themselves.

Eventually, the date of August 2 was decided upon. The first goal was to remove the SS NCOs. They controlled the camp and the idea that was that their removal would create chaos. Also, August 2 was a Monday and there were no transports scheduled. As it turned out, there was a recreational trip planned by the SS.

Yaakov Wernick was a carpenter. He resolved that he would do his best to tell the world about Treblinka after he should survive. This gave him his reason for a living and trying to survive. He was in camp number three where the gas chambers work.

The plan was that the revolt would take place later in the day. Earlier in the day, Wernick went to camp one to get lumber boards. He was told that the revolt would be today at 5:30 PM.

There were 850 Jews there on August 2. With a duplicate key to the armory, Jews were able to get 20 to 25 rifles, 20 stickers and aids and 12 pistols. They also broke into ammunition crates. All of this was taken back to the barracks.

A short while later, SS officer, Katner discovered 2 Jews out of place and searched them and found a significant amount of hidden money. Because of this, the revolt began early. Jews set fire to a gas storage area which was used as a gas station.

Point out the picture.

Jews then torched the rest of the camp. In camp number three there was only one SS and six Ukrainian guards at the time.

Jews began to escape under machine-gun fire from the guard towers.

Bottom line. Of the 850 Jews in Treblinka on that day, 100 chose not to participate in the revolt.

Of the 750 remaining Jews, 200 escaped. 100 of these were captured or killed later. About 70 survived the war. While this percentage is quite low, it was certainly better than 0% chance of actual survival.

After this, Treblinka was shut down. Many of the SS officers who survived the war only to be captured later. One of the SS officers was killed by the Polish Partisans. Of the rest of the SS officers who were arrested and sentenced, not one received the death penalty.

The "Disinfector" (a Jewish prisoner) walks around spraying camp as usual

Only this time, spray cans were filled with stolen gasoline.

"Disinfection" took place right under the Nazis noses.

One hour before the revolt one of the Nazis gets suspicious of a Jew near his home.

A grenade is thrown and a shot is fired.

The other prisoners think that this is the signal to revolt.

Thus the revolt began one hour too early.

Other grenades thrown

The entire camp goes up in flames.

The only thing which did not burn was "Der Judenstaadt," the gas chambers; They could not get close enough to it.

Most everything else destroyed.

Prisoners randomly machine gunned.

200 escape, 12 survive.

Most were turned in by Polish peasants.

August 2, 1943

Was not the last day of Treblinka

As early as February 1943, on orders from Himmler

Jewish sondercommandos were taking bodies out of the burial pits to be burned at another pit.

The remaining POWs continued to burn bodies.

2-1/2 months later: The Germans had had enough (also Sobibor).

All the remaining buildings including the bath house = Der Judenstaadt" were blown up.

Probably many other unknown acts of resistance.

The entire area was plowed and sown with fodder, in order to obliterate all traces of Treblinka.

The Bottom Line

900,000 Jews perish here

Late 1944 Poland liberated

Treblinka had been pillaged by Poles looking for gold teeth and other treasures.

Of the 750,000 who went to Treblinka, 12 escape, 37 survive the war

Challenging questions it poses about human nature:

- What makes people capable of barbarity?
- Do we all have that capability?
- In times of terror and persecution, what does it take to be a resister, an ally, an upstander?

Why did we Jews resist?

- A. Human dignity -
- B. Pride -
- C. Nekamah = Revenge - taking lives with us is resistance

Is there any value to resistance if it fails?

But the revolt failed. 2-1/2 months later, Treblinka gas chambers close.

So perhaps it was not a failure.

It is clear that the Treblinka revolt - considering the conditions under which it was organized and carried through - belongs to one of the most heroic feats of Jewish resistance to Nazism

Additional resource

The heroic uprising at the Treblinka death camp took place today, August 2nd, 1943, 79 years ago. The uprising was led by some 1000 Jewish prisoners, who prepared it for months in advance. During the revolt, the Jewish prisoners blew up the crematorium and weapons arsenals, thus stopping Nazi Germany's killing machine with their own brave hands, leading to the closure of the camp at which approximately 870,000 people were murdered – almost all Jews.

The camp, made mainly of wooden sheds (excluding the gas chambers), burned down during the uprising, and most of the rebels lost their lives. About 200 prisoners managed to flee the burning camp to the nearby forests – but by the time the Red Army reached the area, only some 70 remained alive.

One of the survivors, Samuel (Igo) Willenberg, told the story of the uprising and the unbearable life at the camp in his memoir, "Revolt in Treblinka". Igo passed away in 2016, the last survivor of Treblinka. This is his testimony:

"Construction of a new structure began at the camp in the spring. The prisoners suspected it to be a new gas chamber, as the structure had no windows. They later discovered that it was a weapons arsenal. When construction ended, one of the prisoners – a metalworker – was asked to install a lock on the heavy metal door. He created a lock, gave one set of keys to the Germans and retained a copy of the set for himself. On the day of the revolt, the prisoners broke into the arsenal and stole the weapons, using them to shoot and kill many of the guards and to escape the camp.

We broke out, cut the phone lines and set fire to the sheds and storage rooms that we doused with gasoline earlier. The sentries left the towers, as planned. At first, the Ukrainian guards did not understand what they were seeing. Some fled and hid while others opened fire. We turned to them and shouted: "Niya Strilat, Nashel Kunietz Vini!" (Don't shoot, the war has come to an end!). The sheds were already on fire at that point."

In his testimony, Willenberg says that once the shot was fired, announcing the uprising, the camp was in mayhem, enabling him to escape. While escaping, he saw his campmates being apprehended and murdered by the Germans and he suffered a bullet to the leg, but he did not stop running.

"My group also grew smaller as we ran. When we finally arrived in the forest, we discovered that only four of our group managed to run the 15 km. We entered the forest with gunfire behind us. We stayed in the same place for two days, with no food and nothing to drink. All we had was wild berries that grew on the shrubs above us. We chewed them and they caused us pain. Around us were Germans and police officers. They closed in on the fugitives more and more....

We understood that they discovered and killed some of the fugitives. We were getting exhausted... we decided to set out at night and head for the virgin forests. ...We got to the river that crossed the forest. We lied on the ground, sipped the cool water and bit into the bread. We then swam across the river and entered the virgin forest. It was pouring rain and we rushed to cut down branches to build a small shelter. From that moment on, we considered ourselves free... of the four of us, I am the only one alive."

After many days of hiding in the forest, Willenberg managed to reach a Polish village, where he was helped by the locals who tended to his wounds and showed him where he could hide. Once he recovered, he continued to Warsaw, where he

reunited with his father, joined the Polish Resistance and, a year later, took part in the 1944 Polish uprising in Warsaw.

ROSA ROBOTA HEROINE OF AUSCHWITZ

Rosa Robota has gone down in Jewish Holocaust history as a heroine for her actions involving the smuggling of black powder (schwartzpulver) into Auschwitz. This product was made into explosives which were used during the famous Sonderkommando Revolt. Although this prisoner-uprising failed to stop the wheels of death at Auschwitz, Crematorium IV was successfully destroyed by the demolition. In addition, the prisoners in Auschwitz for a brief moment, showed the Germans they were capable of resistance - even in this most extreme of environments. The actions by Rosa were ones for which she gave up her life - for she was caught, interrogated, tortured and then executed by the SS in Auschwitz.

In November 1942 at age 21, Rosa (Polish name "Rojza") was "deported" from Ciechanow, Poland by rail and arrived at "Anus Mundi": Auschwitz. Her entire immediate family had also been deported to the concentration camps and had died in the gas chambers. After two years of survival in Auschwitz, Rosa was working in a clothing-supply section of the camp complex when she was approached by Noah Zabladowicz, a member of the Jewish underground operating in the camp (Zabladowicz had known Rosa in her hometown). With Himmler's order to step-up the pace of the gassings in the summer of 1944, the rate that people being annihilated each day was astronomical: 46,000 in a 24 hour period on July 24 (the record for any of the camps). The burning pits were ablaze day and night because the crematoria in operation at the time could not keep up. These were the true nightmare days at Auschwitz: the Germans knew the war was lost, but the Fuhurer's desire as he himself predicted in 1939 to annihilate European Jewry was in full-swing.

Noah explained to Rosa that an uprising was to be staged and there were plans to blow up the crematoria and gas chambers in collaboration with outside partisans. Since Rosa had friends working in the Union Munitions Plant (Weichsel-Union-Metalwerke) located within the Auschwitz complex, she was asked to help obtain the schwartzpulver.

Rosa established about 20 contacts with women in the plant who were willing to cooperate. These women smuggled the schwartzpulver into the camp week after week by hiding it inside a trap-door in their dresses. The pockets could be "tripped" and the contents "dumped" if it appeared that the secret would be discovered. There was great risk because prisoners were sometimes searched when returning into the camps from the

factories. The explosives, which looked like small wheels, were delivered to the underground. They were then assembled by a Russian POW munitions expert named Timofei Borodin who used sardine tins to make the final product. The completed devices were then hidden about the camp.

At one point, tragedy occurred - a few of the girls were caught and hanged. Somehow, the authorities did not extract adequate information from these heroines and the operation continued.

One of the many hiding places of the completed explosive devices was with the Sonderkommando, the special Jewish slave detail who handled and processed the corpses from the gas chambers day and night. The explosives were hidden in the carts & lorries used by this "special commando" to haul the corpses. Unfortunately, before the revolt could occur as a concerted effort, the Sonderkommando staged their own uprising with the explosives they had - for they had found out they were about to be gassed in their own turn (members of the this work group were normally selected out and gassed about every 3 months). Subsequently, on October 7, 1944, Crematorium IV was suddenly blown up and an unplanned haphazard revolt began. Four SS men (some records say 5) were killed and several wounded. In the panic and pandemonium, around 600 of the Sonderkommando were able to break through the wires and escape. Unfortunately, all who escaped were caught and shot - with the usual German efficiency and the ever-present cooperation of the people living in the surrounding area. A special Gestapo team was called in to investigate the revolt. The explosives were traced back to the Union plant and several suspects were rounded up. Using typical techniques of torture and "persuasion" under the auspices of the "Political Dept" (operated by the Gestapo), the names of Rosa and 3 other women were extracted. The names of the other women were: Regina Safirsztain (Sapirstein), Ella Gartner (Gertner) and Estucia Wajcblum (Esther Weisblum).

Using connections and at great risk, Noah Zabladowicz was able to visit Rosa in her prison-cell which was called "The Bunker" by those in the camp. He wanted to say farewell to his comrade - for he knew her fate was sealed, as did Rosa, herself. Noah also feared that Rosa had possibly "cracked" under the torture. He had to know if she had or was going to confess anything she knew. His worries were unfounded - Rosa had withstood horrible tortures and cruelty at the hands of her interrogators, but she had told them nothing.

As she lay on the dark floor, half-dead already, she could not even speak at first. When she finally gathered her strength, she told Noah what the torturers had done to her. Noah could hardly comprehend how Rosa had endured the horrendous torture - but she had not betrayed her comrades. She asked that the underground continue its work even in the face of such terrible consequences that she had endured - including the realization that she would be executed the next day. At 23 years old, Rosa and her 3 comrades were hanged

before the camp population. Her last message was a note scratched on a piece of paper she managed to smuggle from her cell: "Hazak V' Amatz" : Be Strong & Brave.

After Rosa's death, the remaining crematoria continued to operate at full capacity. However, realizing defeat, the Germans began to hide the evidence of genocide at Auschwitz. On October 26, only weeks after Rosa's execution, Himmler himself ordered the dismantling of the remaining crematoria. The Russian advance into Germany was well underway and on January 20, 1945, the SS themselves set off demolition charges to finish-off the partially dismantled Crematoria II & III. Six days later, Crematorium V was likewise blown up. On the following day, the Russian Army liberated Auschwitz. There, the Russians found 1000's abandoned by the SS: 1200 survivors in the main camp, 5,800 in Birkenau and around 700 in Monowitz. Those remaining were primarily people who had been unable to walk the hurried death marches of Auschwitz prisoners west into the concentration camps of Germany's interior: Bergen-Belson, Buchenwald, Ravensbruck, etc. In these death marches, thousands of potential survivors of Auschwitz died with liberation only days away.

Of the millions killed Auschwitz, only a few "prisoners" have been immortalized. Rosa Robota will be remembered as one of the few who did not give up in the face of the utter "extremity" - but chose resistance.

TO THE TEACHERS

by Hela Blumengraber

Cracow Ghetto

1942

You taught us to strive for a life of ideals

You exhorted through verses and poems

To soar on the wings of enthusiasm

To unravel life's innermost secrets.

You taught us to love the magic of words
To go into raptures, weeping with awe
To press ever onward and search unrelentingly
For the truth and the cosmos unrevealed.

You enchanted our spirits with "humanist" phrases
You taught us to worship the glory of genius
For this I am now bowed with suffering.
I face the cruel world, al I helpless and lost.

We should have been taught to spring from a crouch
To seize hold of a neck with an iron-strong grip
To stike at the forehead with merciless fist
Until lifeless he crumples and falls!

You should have taught us to shriek till we're heard
How to crash through a gate that is cracked
How to kill to avoid getting killed
And get used to the glitter of blood.

O erudite teachers, men of vast knowledge!
Di d you really and truly not know

That the earth has no place for a humanist?

Why did you plant yearning in our hearts?