

"Defiance and Rebellion during the Holocaust: 70 Years since the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising" - Central theme for Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Day 5773

The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was the first large-scale urban civilian rebellion, predating similar non-Jewish underground activity and uprisings in Europe, and strengthening and uniting Jewish youth in other places. There were some acts of Jewish armed resistance before Warsaw and some preparations that only came to fruition afterwards. When it became clear in the latter half of 1942 that the smaller ghettos in Nesvizh and Lachva (Belorussia) and Tuczyn in Volhynia were to be liquidated, members of the underground and other ghetto inmates acted as one organized force, setting fire to their houses and breaching the fence in an attempt to reach the surrounding forests. In Vilna and Kovno in Lithuania, and in Bialystok, Częstochowa and Będzin in Poland, underground resistance forces trained with all their might and extremely meager resources for future battles that broke out after the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In Krakow, the underground even sent combat units outside the ghetto to the "Aryan" part of the city to stage successful attacks on German military personnel. Finally, tens of thousands of Jews from across Europe made their way into the forests, swamps and mountains to join the partisans, fighting bravely behind enemy lines, and earning numerous military awards for their courage, but rarely surviving their ordeal.

Beside the uprisings in the ghettos, resistance of varied kinds took place at forced labor and concentration camps, at death pits and mass murder sites, and even at three extermination camps: with armed uprisings at Treblinka and Sobibor in the summer of 1943, and at Auschwitz-Birkenau in the fall of 1944. The fact that only a handful of inmates managed to break out of the camps and survive did not overshadow the boldness of the endeavors, which took place in the very places in which human cruelty had reached its deepest depths.

Ultimately, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising became a universal symbol of the heroic struggle by a handful of people in impossible conditions against genocidal oppression. It would later inspire extensive scholarly research and numerous works of literature and the arts – and become a source of pride for the survivors and the entire Jewish nation.

Texts on this year's theme

1. Call to Armed Self-Defense, From an Underground Publication

...We know that Hitler's system of murder, slaughter and robbery leads steadily to a dead end and the destruction of the Jews. The fate of the Jews in the Soviet Russian areas occupied by the Germans, and in the Warthegau, marks a new period in the total annihilation of the Jewish population. The huge murder machine has been turned against Jewish masses that are weak, unarmed, brought low by hunger, camps and deportations. With satanic methods it liquidates the Jewish population centers one by one. The victory over the Jews will have to serve the Germans as recompense for the losses they have suffered at the front. Spilling the blood of defenseless Jews will have to take the place of Hitler's great dreams that failed to come true.

We also know that the march of Hitler's troops has been halted by the heroic Red Army and that the Spring Offensive will see the beginning of the far-reaching destruction of the Nazis in Europe. For the Jewish masses this will be a period of greater bloodshed than any in their history. There is no doubt that when Hitler feels that the end of his rule is approaching, he will seek to drown the Jews in a sea of blood. Jewish youth must prepare in the face of those difficult days. There must therefore be a start to the recruiting of all creative forces amongst the Jews. Despite the destruction many such forces still remain. For generation upon generation passivity and lack of faith in our own strength had pressed upon us; but our history also shows beautiful pages glowing with heroism and struggle.

It is our duty to join this period of heroism....

From the Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir newspaper in the Warsaw Underground "Jutrznia" ("Dawn"), March 28, 1942

2. Call to Resistance by the Jewish Fighting Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto, January 1943

To the Jewish Masses in the Ghetto

On January 22, 1943, six months will have passed since the deportations from Warsaw began. We all remember well the days of terror during which 300,000 of our brothers and sisters were cruelly put to death in the death camp of Treblinka. Six months have passed of life in constant fear of death, not knowing what the next day may bring. We have received information from all sides about the destruction of the Jews in the Government-General, in Germany, in the occupied territories. When we listen to this bitter news we wait for our own hour to come, every day and every moment. Today we must understand that the Nazi murderers have let us live only because they want to make use of our capacity to work to our last drop of blood and sweat, to our last breath. We are slaves. And when the slaves are no longer profitable, they are killed. Everyone among us must understand that, and everyone among us must remember it always.

During the past few weeks certain people have spread stories about letters that were said to have been received from Jews deported from Warsaw, who were said to be in labor camps near Minsk or Bobruisk. Jews in your masses, do not believe these tales. They are spread by Jews who are working for the Gestapo. The blood-stained murderers have a particular aim in doing this: to reassure the Jewish population in order that later the next deportation can be carried out without difficulty, with a minimum of force and without losses to the Germans. They want the Jews not to prepare hiding-places and not to resist. Jews, do not repeat these lying tales.

Do not help the [Nazi] agents. The Gestapo's dastardly people will get their just deserts. Jews in your masses, the hour is near. You must be prepared to resist, not to give yourselves up like sheep to slaughter. Not even one Jew must go to the train. People who cannot resist actively must offer passive resistance, that is, by hiding.....

....Now our slogan must be:

Let everyone be ready to die like a man!

January 1943

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland

3. Call for Resistance by the Jewish Military Organization in the Warsaw Ghetto, January 1943

We are rising up for War!

We are of those who have set themselves the aim of awakening the people. Our wish is to take this watchword to our people:

Awake and fight!

Do not despair of the road to escape!

Know that escape is not to be found by walking to your death passively, like sheep to the slaughter. It is to be found in something much greater: in war!

Whoever defends himself has a chance of being saved! Whoever gives up self-defense from the outset – he has lost already!

Nothing awaits him except only a hideous death in the suffocation machine of Treblinka.

Let the people awaken to war!

Find the courage in your soul for desperate action!

Put an end to our terrible acceptance of such phrases as: We are all under sentence of death!

It is a lie!!!

We also were destined to live! We too have a right to life!

One only needs to know how to fight for it!

It is no great art to live when life is given to you willingly!

But there is an art to life just when they are trying to rob you of this life.

Let the people awaken and fight for its life!

Let every mother be a lioness defending her young!

Let no father stand by and see the blood of his children in silence!

Let not the first act of our destruction be repeated!

An end to despair and lack of faith!

An end to the spirit of slavery amongst us!

Let the tyrant pay with the blood of his body for every soul in Israel!

Let every house become a fortress for us!

Let the people awaken to war!

In war lies your salvation!

Whoever defends himself has a hope of escape!

We are rising in the name of the war for the lives of the helpless masses whom we seek to save, whom we must arouse to action!

It is not for ourselves alone that we wish to fight. We will be entitled to save ourselves only when we have completed our duty! As long as the life of a Jew is still in danger, even one, single life, we have to be ready to fight!!!

Our watchword is:

Not even one more Jew is to find his end in Treblinka!

Out with the traitors to the people!

War for life or death on the conqueror to our last breath!

Be prepared to act!

Be ready!

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland

4. Interview with Yitzhak Zuckerman

Yitzhak Zuckerman (1915-1981), known by his underground pseudonym "Antek" was one of the leaders of the Jewish Fighting Organization, which led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. At the 25th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Yitzhak Zuckerman was interviewed in the Israeli press. The final question he was asked was what were the military and strategic lessons to be learned from the ghetto uprising. He replied:

I don't think there's any need to analyze the uprising in military terms. This was a war of less than a thousand people against a mighty army, and no one doubted how it was likely to turn out. This isn't a subject for study in a military school. Not the weapons, not the operations, not the tactics. If there's a school to study the *human spirit*, there it should be a major subject. The really important things were inherent in the force shown by Jewish youths, after years of degradation, to rise up against their destroyers and determine what death they would choose: Treblinka or Uprising. I don't know if there's a standard to measure *that*.

5. Last Letter from Mordecai Anielewicz, written to Yitzhak (Antek) Zuckerman

It is impossible to put into words what we have been through. One thing is clear, what happened exceeded our boldest dreams. The Germans ran twice from the ghetto. One of our companies held out for 40 minutes and another – for more than 6 hours. The mine set in the "brushmakers" area exploded. Several of our companies attacked the dispersing Germans. Our losses in manpower are minimal. That is also an achievement. Y [Yecheiel] fell. He fell a hero, at the machine-gun. I feel that great things are happening and what we dared do is of great, enormous importance...

Beginning from today we shall shift over to the partisan tactic. Three battle companies will move out tonight, with two tasks: reconnaissance and obtaining arms. Do you remember, short-range weapons are of no use to us. We use such weapons only rarely. What we need urgently: grenades, rifles, machine-guns and explosives.

It is impossible to describe the conditions under which the Jews of the ghetto are now living. Only a few will be able to hold out. The remainder will die sooner or later. Their fate is decided. In almost all the hiding places in which thousands are concealing themselves it is not possible to light a candle for lack of air. With the aid of our transmitter we heard a marvelous report on our fighting by the "Shavit" radio station. The fact that we are remembered beyond the ghetto walls encourages us in our struggle. Peace go with you, my friend! Perhaps we may still meet again! The dream of my life has risen to become fact. Self-defense in the ghetto will have been a reality. Jewish armed resistance and revenge are facts. I have been a witness to the magnificent, heroic fighting of Jewish men of battle.

M. Anielewicz
Ghetto, April 23, 1943

Mordecai Anielewicz (1920-1943) was killed on May 8, 1943 when his bunker on 18 Mila Street fell. Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was named after him, and is the site of a memorial in his honor.

6. The Girl Couriers of the Underground Movement - May 19, 1942

The heroic girls, Chajka [Grosman], Frumke [Plotnicka] and others – theirs is a story that calls for the pen of a great writer. They are venturesome, courageous girls who travel here and there across Poland to cities and towns, carrying Aryan papers which describe them as Polish or Ukrainian. One of them even wears a cross, which she never leaves off and misses when she is in the ghetto. Day by day they face the greatest dangers, relying completely on their Aryan

appearances and the kerchiefs they tie around their heads. They accept the most dangerous missions and carry them out without a murmur; without a moment's hesitation, they accept and carry out the most dangerous missions. If there is need for someone to travel to Vilna, Bialystok, Lemberg, Kowel, Lublin, Czestochowa or Radom to smuggle in such forbidden goods as illegal publications, goods, money, they do it all as though it were the most natural thing. If there are comrades to be recruited from Vilna, Lublin or other cities, they take the job on themselves. Nothing deters them, nothing stops them...

Emmanuel Ringelblum, Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto

7. Our Heroic Youth

Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum was the founder, director and leading spirit of the Underground Archives in the Warsaw Ghetto, also known as "Oneg Shabbat". The excerpt below is taken from his last letter, written on March 1st, 1944, and intended to be read by Jewish cultural figures in the free world. One week later, on March 7, the Gestapo discovered the underground hideout in the ghetto where he and his family were hiding. Dr. Ringelblum, his wife Jehudith, his son Uriah and thirty-five others, mostly intelligentsia, underwent terrible torture at the hands of the Germans, and were shot in the ruins of Warsaw.

.....When those murderous deportation actions started, the idea of putting up a fight took the place of self-help. Our heroic youth, of all [political] persuasions headed the struggle, with those faithful to Eretz Israel at the forefront. The glorious period of armed Jewish resistance in Poland began: the heroic resistance of the Warsaw Ghetto, the magnificent fight in Bialystok, the destruction wrought by Jews in the slaughterhouses of Treblinka and Sobibor, the battles at Tarnow, Bedzin, Czestochowa and other places. Jews demonstrated to the world their ability to engage in an armed struggle, and to die with dignity in battle with the mortal enemy of the Jewish people and of all humanity.....It is doubtful that we will meet again. Give our warm greetings to all Jewish cultural workers, writers, journalists, musicians, sculptors, all builders of present-day Jewish culture and fighters for our national redemption, and that of humanity as a whole.

8. Excerpt from a Report by the Delegatura* to London on the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

...The German units that penetrated into this area of the ghetto at dawn on April 19 were met with strong and effective fire by the defenders. A large number of Germans fell, dead or wounded. The resistance was so strong that the Germans brought up more and more additional units for the operation, including even field guns, flame-throwers and tanks. The situation was complicated by daring sallies on the part of the Jewish fighters, who spread out into sections outside the streets they were defending, and also by the systematic fire of the German attackers which poured into the ghetto from neighboring streets on the other side. The Gendarmerie and SS units did not gain control of the situation, and as a result a Wehrmacht unit was brought into the battle against the ghetto. Throughout Monday, April 19, and Tuesday, April 20, attacks continued by the Gendarmerie, the SS units and the Army units on the ghetto, which was defending itself stubbornly, and all these attacks failed. Heavy shelling continued near the ghetto walls night and day without stopping. German columns in battle formation moved out many times for the assault. Hundreds of Germans fell dead or wounded, and the ghetto continued to defend itself. This brought about a change in the German tactics. They stopped making direct attacks on the ghetto

and began instead to lay siege to it. Movement was stopped in a number of streets close to the ghetto on the Aryan side and the Jewish stronghold surrounded by a great ring of armed German units. The drainage channels were sealed. German guns began to bombard the ghetto with fire-bombs. Many houses went up in flames. For several days past huge clouds of smoke have been rising up over the ghetto, and at night tremendous flames are seen over the northern part of the city. Special loudspeakers ceaselessly call on the inhabitants of the ghetto to surrender. Some of the Jews obeyed the substance of these appeals. Fewer than 10,000 persons lined up at the concentration points names by the Germans and were taken outside of Warsaw. But these were old people, including many women, the aged and weak among the men. All the rest, mainly young men, numbering more than 20,000, are fighting stubbornly. It is quite clear that in this battle the Jewish side is also suffering heavy losses. But it is a fact that in the six days that have passed since the Germans began the *Aktion* against the Warsaw ghetto, the Jews have not suffered defeat, and they reveal absolute determination to continue their self-defense and the struggle, and it looks as though it may continue for a longer period.

This war between the Jews and the Germans has awakened feelings of sympathy and admiration on the Aryan side of Warsaw, and shame among the Germans, who feel rightly that the situation that has come about in Warsaw is an uncommon blow to German prestige. It now appears that the Gestapo, which knows all and can do all, did not succeed in preventing the excellent preparations made by the Jewish population for the struggle and for its defense, with the result that the combined forces of the Gendarmerie, the SS and the Army were unable up to now to overcome this resistance despite the assaults they have been mounting for the past six days...

Archives of the Institute for the Party's History

* The reference is to the Polish Underground leadership, which operated under the Polish Government-in-Exile in London

9. To the Memory of a Fighter (From the diary of Hirsh Berlinski)

It happened on April 20th, 1943, at 3 pm.

The mine exploded, thus giving the signal for battle. Abram Diamant kept watch at his position, camouflaged by a few mattresses on No. 32 Swietojerska Street, his battle post. He was an elderly worker, educated by the workshop and the Party.

Some leaders at his job thought him to old for battle. We, his ideological companions, knew him well and were convinced that he would be peerless in battle and would better ten younger comrades.

We sensed his burning desire to give battle in each of his words, in each of his movements. He used to say "may the moment come, when instead of the words the gun speaks, then we shall see who is old and who young."

Now the moment has come, here I stand admiring his exemplary stature, his exemplary attitude and tactics in battle.

Facing a heavy machine-gun and a field-piece which spew incessant fire on his barricade, he stands there alone, in battle.

The barricade destroyed, he leaps like a tiger, with his fiery eyes, from one point to another, leaps and keeps shooting at the Germans.

He has already hit six of them – this is what he whispers. "Have a taste of a Jew, you Jerries. Let's give them some powder to smell" – that's what he says with distinct pleasure. The battle-post falls apart, the Germans take the lower floor. The group retreats. Diamant takes cover and implores: "Let me, only the one there at the machine-gun, I have him already in my sights". He fires, and the mighty SS man, the hero of the Herrenvolk leaps up and falls back, the bark of his gun is silenced. Diamant and his group retreat.

On April 21 the Brushmakers' Shop is on fire. Germans keep shooting at the burning Jews. Our battle positions are destroyed. In the night, Diamant with his comrades break through to the main force in the Ghetto. We take up a position in the Supply Department at Franciszkanska 30. Night after night, through the ruins and through burning houses, Diamant walks with his gun slung on his back, through all the dangers lurking all around – he goes to secure some warm food for his comrades.

And thus until the day of May 1 came...the Germans found our bunker. Germans are in our bunker, someone reports from the first entrance. Z. Stolak runs to that entrance with a few fighters. They shoot salvoes, Germans respond with grenades. The dugout entry is blocked with debris, the command is given to slip through the other dugout and give battle in the yard. Among the first three out is Diamant. We fight tooth to tooth, eye to eye: two Germans are wounded, a third escapes. We – Jelen, Diamant, Abramek – take up position among the debris, our purpose being not to let the Germans break through to the second entrance. This is partly achieved, most of the fighters are out in the yard and the battle goes on. As Diamant is hit, his hand grabs close to the heart, he struggles to hand me his gun, fails, falls down into the burning cellar with his rifle, disappears in the smoke and flames.

When we were burying our dead in the evening, his body was missing in that common grave.

Only his body was missing. His name survives. It shall remain as a symbol of a fighting spirit and readiness for sacrifice.

A companion in battle

Joseph Kermish (Ed.) "To Live with Honor and Die with Honor", Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives "O.S." (Oneg Shabbat)

10. Warsaw

....A week ago the second stage began in the brutal annihilation of the Polish Jews. The Germans set about expelling the 40,000 Jews who still remained in Warsaw. The ghetto replied with armed struggle. The Jewish Fighting Organization opened a war of the weak against the strong. With scant forces, few arms and little ammunition, without water, blinded by smoke and fire, the Jewish fighters defended streets and individual houses. In the dusk they withdrew step by step, more because of the fire that had taken hold in the close-built houses than because of the enemy who was equipped with modern military

arms. They considered it a victory if a part of those imprisoned in the ghetto were able to escape; it was a victory in their eyes to die while their hands still grasped arms...

From the Underground AK newspaper Biuletyn Informacyjny ("Information Bulletin"), No. 17, April 29, 1943

...Now that Warsaw has witnessed the last act of the bestial German action, we cannot simply pass over the change in attitude of the victims, who, being unable to change their fate, decided to fall with arms in their hands. This stand of theirs, understood by every Pole, changes the picture significantly. From a people without hope, a herd slaughtered by the German murderers, the Jews rose to the heights of a fighting people. And if it could not fight for its existence, a thing made impossible by the overwhelming advantage in numbers of the enemy, it did demonstrate its right to life as a nation.

The Polish public looks upon this happening with great respect, gives it its moral support and hopes that its resistance will continue for as long as is possible...

From the Underground newspaper Mysl Panstwowa ("State Thought"), No. 37, April 30, 1943

11. The Revolt of the Doves

On the eve of Passover the Warsaw ghetto was surrounded. From the lookout I watched the army advancing in columns beside the wall. I saw masses of gleaming helmets in the morning sun, and my heart seemed to stop. I pulled the pin of the grenade and threw it out of the window. From that moment every house in the Warsaw ghetto became a battle position.

From the windows, on every floor, fire was poured on the Germans and the Ukrainians. Deborah stood in the window above me.

A soldier noticed her and shouted to his friend as if shocked:

Look, Hans, a Jewish woman with a gun!

They aimed their rifles at her, but Deborah was quicker. She threw a grenade at them, the only one she had.

The Sound and the Fury

The winter of 1944 was nearing its end. The paths in the forest were thawing by day, and at night the earth was frozen again like sharp glass.

The Partisans who reached the entrance of the village under cover of darkness split into two groups, the Russian company taking up positions in the west and south, while the Jewish company dug in on the bank of the frozen river. There were seven minutes to go before the awaited signal. The loud voices of the German soldiers slowly became silent behind the houses. Baruch and Uri had grown up among those wooden houses. They had played and dreamed in the alleys. In the woods near the old cemetery where they first experienced love, their families had been brought to be massacred.

A red flare was fired, and Zaytev's group screamed all at once:

Forward comrades, for the sake of your homeland!

At the same moment, the voice of Baruch was heard loud and clear in Yiddish:

For the sake of spilled blood, comrades, for our brothers!

Uri released the pin and jumped to his feet. Words ceased. And he heard nothing else but the fire in front of him and the ice shattering under his feet.

Abba Kovner, The Scrolls of Fire

12. The Manifesto

This "manifesto" was written by Mordechai Tenenbaum-Tamaroff (1916-1943), the leader of the Bialystok ghetto revolt on January 13, 1943, or close to this date. It was to be distributed on the day the Germans would start the aktion for the final liquidation of the Bialystok ghetto. The revolt of the ghetto fighters, led by Tenenbaum-Tamaroff in August 1943, was militarily unsuccessful because the ghetto-fighters' weapons lasted only three days, but their valor is remembered and lives on.

Fellow Jews!

Days of horror are upon us. Not just the ghetto, the yellow star, hatred and loathing, insult and humiliation: we are facing death!

In front of our eyes our wives, our children, our parents, brothers and sisters are led to their deaths. Thousands have already gone: tens of thousands are destined to go. In such awesome hours, which decide our fate to be or not to be, we tell you.

Know this:

Five million Jews have already been murdered by Hitler and his executioners. No more than 10 percent of Polish Jewry remains. In Chelmno, Belzec, Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor and other death camps, more than three million Polish Jews have been tortured, murdered and put to unnatural death.

Know this:

All the deported are led to death!

Don't believe the Gestapo's false propaganda about letters supposedly sent by the deported. This is a cynical lie. The deported are led to huge crematoria and to mass graves in the depths of the Polish forests. Every one of us has been sentenced to death!

We have nothing to lose! Don't believe that work will save you. After the first *aktion* will come the second and then the third-until the last Jew. Dividing of the ghetto into different categories is a familiar ploy of the Gestapo who want to trick and deceive us. They want to make their job easier by deceiving us with illusions.

Fellow Jews!

We are being led to Treblinka! They will gas us like leprous animals and then burn us in the crematoria.

Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter! If we are too weak to defend our lives, at least we are strong enough to defend our honor as Jews and as human beings, to show the world that though we are shackled and bound, our spirit is alive!

Do not go to your death of your own accord. As long as there is breath in you, fight for your life, greet your executioners with tooth and nail, with knife and axe, with acid and iron bars. Let the enemy pay with blood for blood, with death for death.

Will you hide in rat-holes while your loved ones are lead to death and desecration? Will you sell your wives, children, parents and your own souls for a few weeks of slavery? Let us attack our enemies, ambush them, kill them, disarm them; let us resist our murderers and, if necessary, let us die fighting like heroes, and in our death-we shall live!

We have nothing to lose but our honor! Don't sell your lives cheaply! Revenge the annihilated communities and devastated towns. When you leave your homes, set them on fire. Burn the factories and destroy them. Let the enemy inherit nothing from us.

Jewish youths! Follow the example of many warriors, Jewish martyrs, dreamers and builders, pioneers and men of action-stand up and fight!

Hitler will be defeated in war. The alliance of oppressors and cannibals will be obliterated from the face of the earth. The world will be purified and cleansed. For this bright future of humanity you must not die like dogs! Go to the forests, join the partisans. Do not flee the ghetto; unarmed you will be shot. After discharging your national duty-go to the forest armed.

You can obtain arms off any German in the ghetto. Courage!

(Dapim Min Hadleika, translated from the Hebrew by Marganit Weinberger-Rotman)

13. Justyna

Gusta Dawidsohn Draenger (otherwise known as Justyna) was a member of the ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organization) in Cracow. The organization resisted in many ways: Germans were killed on the streets of Cracow; a German pilot was killed in Blonie; rails were demolished on the Cracow-Bochnia route, to name but a few. On December 23 1942, Jewish fighters threw grenades into cafés. Dozens of German soldiers were killed in the action. Many more were seriously wounded. Justyna was arrested, and while she was in jail she kept a diary. She wrote of the resisters:

Would anyone ever be able to understand why a group of madmen who, as people and as Jews, had long ago lost their right to live and while living and breaking the law, would take up arms?

It was sufficient to simply show up on a street, without a gun in one's pocket, without any partisan intentions, to get into trouble. Would anyone ever understand the fear of a slip that a revolutionary feels, even before going on an assignment? Would anyone be able to comprehend the fear of a death which could end a person's life before he has had a chance to do something for the cause? Not one of them was afraid of dying, only of being captured too soon, of falling into the hands of the enemy while doing a minor job and not the real work. They all had the same personal wish – they wanted to die with dignity, in a battle, and not because of some silly accident.

Justyna's Diary

14. Proclamation by Jewish Pioneer Youth Group in Vilna, Calling for Resistance, January 1, 1942

They shall not take us like sheep to the slaughter!
Jewish youth, do not be led astray. Of the 80,000 Jews in the "Jerusalem of Lithuania"[Vilna] only 20,000 have remained. Before our eyes they tore from us our parents, our brothers and sisters. Where are the hundreds of men who were taken away for work by the Lithuanian "snatchers"? Where are the naked women and children who were taken from us in the night of terror of the *provokatzia*?
Where are the Jews [who were taken away on] the Day of Atonement?
Where are our brothers from the second ghetto?
All those who were taken away from the ghetto never came back.
All the roads of the Gestapo lead to Ponary.
And Ponary is death!

Doubters! Cast off all illusions. Your children, your husbands and your wives are no longer alive.
Ponary is not a camp – all are shot there.
Hitler aims to destroy all the Jews of Europe. The Jews of Lithuania are fated to *Let us not go as sheep to slaughter!*
It is true that we are weak and defenseless, but resistance is the only reply to the enemy!
Brothers! It is better to fall as free fighters than to live by the grace of the murderers.
Resist! To the last breath.

January 1, 1942, Vilna ghetto

15. Proclamation by the FPO (United Partisans Organization) Calling for Revolt in Vilna, September 1, 1943

Jews, prepare for armed resistance!
The German and Lithuanian hangmen have reached the gates of the ghetto. They will murder us all. They will take us, group by group, through the gates. That is how they took them in their hundreds on the Day of Atonement. That is how they took them at the time of the White, the Yellow and the Pink papers*.
That is how they took our brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, our children. That is how they took tens of thousands away to their death.
But we will not go!
We will not let them take us like animals to slaughter.
Jews, prepare for armed resistance!
Do not believe the false assurances of the murderers, do not believe the words of the traitors. Whoever is taken through the gate of the ghetto has only one road ahead – Ponary. And Ponary is death.
Jews, we have nothing to lose.
Death is certain. Who can still believe that he will survive when the murderers kill systematically? The hand of the hangman will reach out to each of us. Neither hiding nor cowardice will save lives.
Only armed resistance can save our lives and honor.
Brothers, it is better to fall in battle in the ghetto than to be led like sheep to Ponary.
Know that in the ghetto there is an organized Jewish force which will rise up with arms in its hands.
Rise up for the armed resistance!
Don't hide in the malines. You will fall there like mice in the hands of the murderers.
Jewish masses – Out into the streets!
Those who have no arms, get hold of an axe
Those who haven't an axe take hold of an iron bar or a cudgel!
- For our murdered children
- For our parents
- For Ponary.
Strike the murderers!
In every street, in every yard, in every room, within the ghetto and outside the ghetto.
Strike the dogs!
Jews, we have nothing to lose. We can save our lives only if we kill the murderers.
Long live liberty! Long live armed resistance!
Death to the murderers!

Command Staff
United Partisans Organization – FPO (*Fareinikte Partizaner Organizatsie*)
Vilna Ghetto
September 1, 1943

* Documents of various types that were distributed in the ghetto

16. Vilna

The beginning of our division, the Jewish Partisan Division, was in the sewers. Behind us we had left an open mass-grave and ruins and two years of bloody self-defense.

Those who descended into the sewers did not imagine they would be saved. Whoever did not see the long chain of human forms in the depths of the ground has no idea what a nightmare march it was. One hundred and fifty seeming-corpse moving in a tunnel, angry-faced and carrying revolvers, like unextinguished candles in their hands. Three days earlier, we had descended into the sewers in order to break a way out of the ghetto. At night we came up in an empty courtyard. After that, we broke out of the city in small groups. Most of the streets were closed off by patrols and suddenly-shining searchlights. Our girls maintained contact between the groups in the dark. On the way, three of our men were taken from us. We afterwards found out that they had come up against a German guard-patrol, shot at it and killed its officer. They were caught and publicly hanged. (Two of them were of our command, Chvoynik and Yaakov Kaplan.) After that, we spent the night in an abandoned palace that had belonged to Pushkin.

.....Two days later we went on our first action. We had no mines and there was no TNT in our stores. With our bare hands we dismantled a section of railway line. Next time we went out to ambush with a few miserable rifles. The commander had one sub-machine-gun and his second-in-command had another. Both of them were borrowed. After that we had to blow up a railway. The partisans had a routine way of doing things: when they managed to lay a mine, they would quickly withdraw from the area at once. But we lay down near the lines and waited. We would press our faces into the dust when a guard went by-but we did not move until our eyes saw what we had been waiting for: the enemy train going heavenwards in a cloud! Now and again we would catch the cries of the wounded, and someone would say: "That's for Ponar!"

Perhaps our boys fought so well because there was some question burning within their souls or perhaps because they wanted to remove some weight from their hearts. We would stand and watch as the enemy installations caught fire; we would stand and watch as the flame glowed in tens of shades of red. When we were on our way back, someone would turn the group around and gesture: "What redness!- Jews' blood!" Perhaps that is why we fondled and kissed every rifle we captured, not to speak of machine-guns. Perhaps that is why we waited so expectantly for the aeroplane which supplied us with arms. Finally the Halm Forest became ours and the enemy did not dare to set foot in it. And every farmer and every Lithuanian and every German knew: Jewish partisans are in control there!

Abba Kovner

17. "Zog Nit Keyn Mol" ("Never Say") (Hymn of the Partisans)

After hearing news of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Hirsh Glick, a twenty-year-old poet and partisan living in the Vilna ghetto, wrote "Zog Nit Keyn Mol" ("Never Say"). Glick's poem, set to music by Soviet composer Dimitri Porkass, quickly became the hymn of Jewish resistance in Eastern Europe, and assumed international importance after its subsequent translation into several languages. Hirsh Glick himself was imprisoned in a labor camp in Estonia, and escaped in 1944. He joined the partisans and was killed by the Germans the same year.

Never say you've come to the end of the way,
Though leaden skies blot out the light of the day.
The hour we all long for will surely appear –
Our steps will thunder with the words: We are here!

From lands of palm trees to far-off lands of snow,
We come with anguish, we come with grief,
with pain and woe;
And where our blood flowed right before our eyes
There our power'll bloom, our courage will arise.

The glow of morning sun will gild a bright today,
Night's darkness vanish, like the enemy cast away.
But if we perish before this dawn's begun –
This song's a message passed to daughter and to son.

In blood this song was written, and not with pen or quill,
Not from a songbird freely flying as he will.
Sung by a people crushed by falling walls –
Sung with guns in hand, by those whom freedom calls!

18. Treblinka

At the organizing committee meeting, held late at night by the light of fires burning the bodies of hundreds of thousands of those dearest to us, we unanimously approved the decision to launch the uprising the next day, August 2. I will never forget the white-haired Ze'ev Korland, the eldest among us all, who, with tears in his eyes, administered to us the oath to fight to our last drop of blood for the honor of the Jewish people. Every man present sensed the tremendous responsibility involved in our decision to eliminate this creation of mad German sadism and bring an end to Treblinka.

Shmuel Rajzman, as quoted in Yitzhak Arad, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka-The Operation Reinhard Death Camps, pp. 284

Shots were being fired at the tower guards. The air shook from an explosion, then a second and a third....Prisoners were running in every direction....The confusion was indescribable. One of the wooden huts, well dried by the sun and wind, went up in flames. Among the crowd I saw several panic-stricken Germans running about the square, hiding behind trees....Black clouds of smoke covered the sky. Rifles and machine guns cracked from the six guard towers. Scattered single shots from our side replied...

From the nearby tower, a machine gun spit out bursts of fire. They hit their mark, thinning out our ranks, the situation in this sector had become critical. Near me a man was holding a rifle but not firing. I grabbed it, aimed it long and

carefully, then pulled the trigger once, twice, a third time. The dark silhouette on the tower slumped over the railing, the machine gun was silenced...then again firing commenced. We dodged from tree to tree towards the fence...I reached the fence. The severed wire dangled lazily. Now we had to run across an open area of 50 meters to the next barbed wire and the anti-tank barriers. The machine gun stepped up its bursts. Behind me, at the outer fence, tragedy. The brave ones climbed up the iron and wire complex only to be hit there by a bullet. They fell with screams of despair...More prisoners climbed over the still-quivering bodies, and they, too, were cut down and fell, their crazed eyes staring at the camp, which now looked like a giant torch...I crawled through the open area and reached the barriers. I looked around. The dead had created a sort of bridge over the barbed wire complex across which another escapee moved every moment. Past the barriers began the forest, rescue, freedom....With a leap, I climbed the bridge of bodies. I heard a shot, felt a blow-but another jump, and I was in the forest. Ahead, to the sides and behind me, men were running...

Shmuel Wilenberg, as quoted in Yitzhak Arad, op. cit., pp. 291-292

Out of approximately 850 prisoners in the camp that day... it can be assumed that about 100 fugitives managed to get clear of the Treblinka region and scatter throughout occupied Poland.

Yitzhak Arad, op. cit., p. 298

19. Auschwitz

When the Sonderkommando began to prepare in earnest for the uprising, the planners thought of using the young women from the gunpowder pavilion to procure explosives with which to fill the homemade grenades and fragmentation bombs. For a while, the young women hesitated, terror-stricken by the SS. Eventually, the insurrectionist Alla Gertner finally managed to persuade the other young women - Regina Spir, Esther Weisblum and her sister Hannale Weisblum - to cooperate... The young women managed to steal certain quantities of gunpowder and smuggle them out in their lunch boxes (especially equipped with false bottoms), in the knots of their head-kerchiefs, in the folds of their dresses and in other secret ways. The packets of gunpowder would be transferred to Rozia Robota and Hadassah Zlotnicka, who would then pass them on to the inmate Godel Silber... from Silber, they would be given to the Sonderkommando member Jukel Wrubel. Other runners in the gunpowder chain were Israel Gutman and Yehuda Laufer, who worked in the "Union" factory. They would bring the gunpowder to the Soviet pyrotechnicians, who...would prepare the bombs in tin cans. The bombs were buried by the Sonderkommando laborers in various locations. When the revolt did break out they were used to blow up the crematorium.

Ber Mark, The Scrolls of Auschwitz

The revolt broke out. Within a few minutes it included hundreds of the Sonderkommando. The no. 2 oven was blown up and completely destroyed. The German kapo, known for his cruelty, was thrown in alive. Four SS men were killed and two were injured in hand to hand fighting. The area of the crematoria turned into a battlefield. The prisoners burst through the fence and hundreds of them spread over the whole area. The Nazis began to panic. Two thousand soldiers quickly mobilized and a state of alert was declared in the camp... The Nazis' self-confidence melted away. It became clear that their bravery was reserved for murder.

The Birkenau prisoners and those of other camps did not come to the aid of the revolting prisoners. The rebels' fate could be foreseen. But the

Sonderkommando's day of revolt became a symbol of vengeance and of encouragement to the other prisoners. The first Nazis to fall in Auschwitz were killed in a place which had been a vale of death for millions of victims – and they were killed by prisoners; and it was Jews who fought. In the enormous camp, with its thousands of prisoners, a handful of Jews had torn through the atmosphere of defeat and of submission to fate.

The Heroic Struggles: The Story of Revolt and Resistance by the Jewish Fighters in the Camps and Ghettos in World War II, New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies

All the participants of that uprising, which took place on October 7th, 1944 fell in battle. After the uprising, the SS discovered that it was a group of young women who had smuggled out and supplied the gunpowder used in the uprising. Four of these women, Alla Gertner, Esther Weissblum, Regina Spir and Rozia Robota, were arrested. They did not reveal any information, even after being tortured, and they were publicly hanged on January 6th, 1945. Prior to the uprising, the prisoners of the Sonderkommando accomplished another very important act of resistance: some of them managed to keep diaries, in which they described in detail the events at Auschwitz. These diaries were hidden in the ground. Discovered after the war, they provide the most significant, terrible and authentic documents on Nazi barbarity in Auschwitz.

20. The Revolt at the Sobibor Extermination Camp

....As though in response to an order, several axes that had been hidden under coats appeared and were brought down on his head. At that moment the convoy from the second camp approached. A few women who were frightened by what they saw began to scream, some even fainted. Some began to run crazily, without thinking and without purpose. In that situation there was no question of organizing or maintaining order, and therefore I shouted at the top of my voice:

"Forward, comrades!"

"Forward!" someone echoed behind me on the right.

"For the Fatherland, for Stalin, forward!"

The proud cries came like thunder from clear skies in the death camp. In one moment these slogans united the Jews of Russia, Poland, Holland, Czechoslovakia, Germany. Six hundred men who had been abused and exhausted broke into cries of "Hurrah!" for life and freedom.

The assault on the arms store failed. Machine-gun fire barred our way. Most of the people who were escaping turned in the direction of the main gate. There, after they finished off the guards, under cover of fire from the rifles that a few of them had, they threw stones and scattered sand in the eyes of the Fascists who stood in their way, broke through the gate and hurried in the direction of the forest.

One group of prisoners turned left. I saw how they attacked the barbed-wire fence. But after they had cleared away this obstacle, they still had to cross a minefield that was about 15 meters wide. Many of them surely fell here. I turned towards the Officers' House with a group of prisoners; we cut the barbed wire there and so made an opening. The assumption that the area near the Officers' House would not be mined proved correct.

Three of our comrades fell near the barbed wire, but it was not clear whether they stepped on mines or were wounded by bullets, as salvos were fired on us from various directions.

We are already on the far side of the fence, and the minefield is behind us. We have already gone 100 meters, then another 100...fast, still faster...we must cross the bare, open area where we are exposed to the bullets of the murderers... fast, still faster, we must get to the forest, get among the trees, get into shelter... and already we are in the shade of the trees.

I stopped for a moment to catch my breath and cast a glance backwards. Exhausted, with their last strength, running bent over, forwards..... we were near the forest. Where is Loka? Where is Shlomo?

* * *

...It is difficult to say for certain how many people escaped from the camp. In any case, it is clear that the great majority of the prisoners escaped. Many fell in the open space that was between the camp and the forest. We were agreed that we should not linger in the forest, but divide up into small groups and go in different directions. The Polish Jews escaped in the direction of Chelm. They were drawn there by their knowledge of the language and the area. We, the Soviets, turned east. The Jews who had come from Holland, France and Germany were particularly helpless. In all the wide area that surrounded the camp there was none with whom they had a common language.

The shots from machine-guns and rifles that rattled behind us from time to time helped us to decide on the direction that we needed. We knew that the shooting came from the camp. The telephone line had been cut, and Franz had no way of calling for help. The echo of the shots became more distant and disappeared. It was already beginning to get dark when we once more heard shots echoing far away. Probably they came from our pursuers...

We began to march.

From time to time, from one side or the other, we were joined by new people. I questioned all of them whether they had seen Loka or Shlomo. Nobody had seen them.

We emerged from the forest. We walked for 3 kilometers over open fields, until we reached an open canal about 5 or 6 meters wide. The canal was very deep, and it was not possible to cross it on foot. When I tried to walk around it, I observed a group of people at a distance of about 50 meters from us. We dropped flat on the ground and sent out Arkadiosh to reconnoiter. At first he crawled on his stomach, but after a minute, he got to his feet and ran up to the people. A few minutes later he was back.

"Sasha, they are some of our people. They found tree trunks by the side of the canal and are crossing on them to the other side. Kalimali is there among them." That is how we crossed the canal...

The author, Alexander Peczorski, a Jewish Soviet prisoner of war, was one of the organizers of the uprising in the Sobibor camp on October 14, 1943.

Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, 1981, Document #166