

SS General Stroop on the Battles in the Warsaw Ghetto Revolt Final Report from the German Battle Diary, April- May 1943

April-May 1943

...In January 1943, the *Reichsfuehrer* SS, on the occasion of his visit to Warsaw, ordered the SS and Police Leader (*SS- und Polizeifuehrer*) in the Warsaw District to *transfer to Lublin the armament factories and other enterprises of military value installed within the ghetto, including the labor force and machinery*. It proved to be rather difficult to carry out this order, since both the managers of the enterprises and the Jews resisted this transfer in every conceivable way. The SS and Police Leader therefore decided to carry out the transfer of the enterprises forcibly in the course of a *Grossaktion* (major *Aktion*), which was to have been carried out in the course of three days. The preparations and military orders for this *Grossaktion* had been completed by my predecessor.* I myself arrived in Warsaw on April 17, 1943, and took over command of the *Grossaktion* at 8 o'clock, after the *Aktion* itself had [already] started at 6 o'clock on the same day....

The number of Jews brought out from the houses and held during the first few days was relatively small. It proved that the Jews were hiding in the sewer canals and in specially constructed bunkers. Where it had been assumed during the first days that there were only isolated bunkers, it proved in the course of the *Grossaktion* that the whole ghetto had been systematically provided with cellars, bunkers and passageways. The passages and bunkers all had access to the sewers. This enabled the Jews to move underground without interference. The Jews also used this network of sewers to escape underground into the Aryan part of the city of Warsaw. There were constant reports that Jews were attempting to escape through the sewer holes... How far the Jews' precautions had gone was demonstrated by many instances of bunkers skillfully laid out with accommodation for entire families, facilities for washing and bathing, toilets, storage bins for arms and ammunition, and large

food reserves sufficient for several months. There were different bunkers for poor and for rich Jews. It was extremely difficult for the task forces to discover the individual bunkers owing to camouflage, and in many cases it was made possible only through betrayal on the part of the Jews.

After a few days it was already clear that the Jews would under no circumstances consider voluntary resettlement, but were determined to fight back by every means and with the weapons in their possession. Under Polish-Bolshevik leadership so-called fighting units were formed which were armed and paid any price asked for available arms....

...While at first it had been possible to capture the Jews, who are ordinarily cowards, in considerable numbers, the apprehending of the bandits** and Jews became increasingly difficult in the second half of the *Grossaktion*. Again and again, fighting units of 20 to 30 or more Jewish youths, 18 to 25 years old, accompanied by corresponding numbers of females, renewed the resistance. These fighting units were under orders to continue armed resistance to the end and, if necessary, to escape capture by suicide.

One such fighting unit succeeded in climbing out of the sewer through a manhole in so-called Prosta [Street] and to get on to a truck and escape with it (about 30 to 35 bandits)....***

During the armed resistance females belonging to the fighting units were armed in the same way as the men; some were members of the He-Halutz Movement. It was no rarity for these females to fire pistols with both hands. It happened again and again that they kept pistols and hand-grenades (Polish "egg" grenades) hidden in their bloomers up to the last moment, in order to use them against the men of the *Waffen-SS* [military unit of the SS], Police and Wehrmacht.

The resistance offered by the Jews and bandits could be broken only by the energetic, tireless deployment of storm-patrols night and day. *On April 23, 1943, the Reichsfuehrer SS, through the Higher SS and Police Fuehrer for the East, in Cracow, issued the order that the Warsaw ghetto be combed out with maximum severity and ruthless determination.* I therefore decided to carry out the total destruction of the Jewish quarter by burning down all residential blocks, including the blocks attached to the armament factories. One by one

the factories were systematically cleared and then destroyed by fire. Almost always the Jews then emerged from their hiding places and bunkers. Not rarely, the Jews stayed in the burning houses until the heat and fear of being burned to death caused them to jump from the upper floors after they had thrown mattresses and other upholstered objects from the burning houses to the street. With broken bones they would then try to crawl across the street into buildings which were not yet, or only partially, in flames. Often, too, Jews changed their hiding places during the night, by shifting into the ruins of buildings already burned out and taking refuge there until they were found by one of the shock troop units....

Only as a result of the unceasing and untiring efforts of all forces did we succeed in capturing altogether 56,065 Jews, i.e., definitely destroying them. To this figure should be added Jews who lost their lives in explosions, fires, etc., the number of which could not be definitely established....

Warsaw, May 16, 1943

The SS and Police Leader

in the Warsaw District

Stroop

SS *Brigadefuehrer*

and Major General of Police

PS-1061.

* SS and Police Leader in the Warsaw District, *Oberfuehrer* von Sammern-Frankenegg.

** This was the word used by the Germans for partisans and armed underground fighters.

*** The reference is to a group of the Jewish Fighting Organization that escaped through a sewer in Prosta Street on the Aryan side of the city on May 10, 1943.

Source: *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 no. 143

