

From the Diary of Emanuel Ringelblum on Preparations for Resistance in the Warsaw Ghetto

The famed Uprising, in April and May, 1943 in the Warsaw Ghetto, is universally regarded as a turning point, an absolutely new departure, not only in the chronicles of Jewish resistance to the German oppressor, but also in the history of the general struggle for the liberation of Warsaw. This was the first time when Jews took part in a major, indeed large-scale battle of that struggle. For the first time, after the defeat in 1939, the thunder of cannon and the echoing clutter of machine-guns were heard again in the capital city of Poland. The Jewish Uprising induced changes in the struggle of the Polish underground movement, which until then had concentrated its efforts mainly on acts of sabotage, and on acquiring arms and ammunition by disarming German soldiers and police. April 19, 1943, became a symbol of the Jewish public's contribution to the fight for freedom from the Nazi regime, and a motivating factor in the war of the Polish underground.

“Little Stalingrad” Defends Itself

April 1943 was approaching, a memorable date in the history of Warsaw Jewry, the date of the liquidation of the Jews in Warsaw. The illegal government in the Ghetto, the O.B. [Jewish Combat Organization], prepared energetically for its defence. Considerable funds were obtained by terror from war profiteers who would not have given a penny voluntarily. The unwilling ones or their families were kidnapped in broad daylight and taken to secret flats until they paid the levy, amounting to tens of thousands and sometimes even hundreds of thousands of zloty. War was declared on informers, Gestapo-agents who helped the Germans in production, *Werkschutz* who oppressed the people living in the workshops, the directors of the shops, and those who made propaganda for voluntary departure to the SS labour camps in Trawniki or Poniatow. Death sentences were carried out in front of everyone; announcements and explanations of the sentences were posted on workshop walls and Ghetto walls. These death sentences made a deep

impression on everyone. The authority of the O.B. grew, securing the obedience of the population by propaganda and by bullets. This had to be taken into consideration by the “kings” of German industry, Toebbens and Schultz, who polemized with the O.B. on the walls of the workshops, calling on their workers to go to Poniatow and Trawniki. I remember a conversation I had with the commander of the O.B., member of the Council of the *Hashomer Hatzair* (Jewish scouts organization), Mordecai Anielewicz (pseudonym “Marian” – Mordekhai), who was killed in the April “action”. He gave an accurate appraisal of the chances of the uneven struggle, he foresaw the destruction of the Ghetto and the workshop, and he was sure that neither he nor his combatants would survive the liquidation of the Ghetto. He was sure that they would die like stray dogs and no one would even know their last resting-place. After repeated heroic deeds in January and April 1943, he was killed, a few weeks after the April “action” began, in a hide-out with five entrances, suffocated by gas which the Germans threw in before they broke into the hide-out from all five sides¹.

Source: Joseph Kermish (Ed.), *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor! Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives “O.S” [“Oneg Shabbath”]*, Yad Vashem 1986, pp. 599-600.

¹ Anielewicz perished on 8 May 1943, in the command bunker of the Jewish Combat Organization at 18 Mila Street. Several scores of his comrades-in-arms perished with him.