

From the Diary of Emanuel Ringelblum on the women fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

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

Among the rumours being spread on the Aryan side at that time there was a good deal of fantasy, but there were also authentic facts, if somewhat altered. The legend about the Jewish Maid of Orleans had its origin in the fact that Jewish girls took part in combat alongside the men. I knew these heroic girls from the period preceding the “action”. Most of them belonged to the *Hashomer Hatzair* and *Hechalutz* movements. Throughout the war, they had carried on welfare work all the time with great devotion and extraordinary self-sacrifice. Disguised as Aryan women, they had carried illegal literature around the country, managed to get everywhere with instructions from the Jewish National Committee; they bought and transported arms, executed O.B. death sentences, and shot gendarmes and SS-men during the January “action”. Altogether they completely outdid the men in courage, alertness and daring. I myself saw Jewish women firing a machine gun from a roof. Clearly one of these heroic girls must have distinguished herself in the heavy fighting waged

by the O.B. at Świętojerska Street, and that was probably the origin of the story of the Jewish Maid of Orleans.

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. 602-603.