

**Pogonowski - Kielce from 12**

the Germans had been organizing since 1933. The Polish Armed Resistance reported that 500,000 Jews were crowded into the Warsaw Ghetto: 600 people per acre. Hunger and unspeakably poor hygienic and sanitary conditions resulted in the spreading of tuberculosis and other contagious diseases. The Polish Underground reported: "The isolated ghetto is restricted to internal trade, consisting of people's private property, clothing, and household goods which are sold at low prices for extremely expensive food.... There is no heating fuel in the ghetto.... The health and sanitary conditions are beyond description - there is monstrous hunger and poverty.... Overcrowded streets are full of aimless, pale, and starving people.... People die in the streets.... An orphanage is being overcrowded with daily arrivals of newborn babies.... The Germans' plunder of the once-affluent Jews continues...as well as the treatment of Jews in an exceptionally brutal manner..."

Each ghetto had its own Jewish Council (Judenrat) which oversaw day to day affairs and a Jewish police force which carried out German orders to supply laborers and, as pointed out by Jewish historians such as Isaiah Trunk and Hannah Arendt, to round up Jews for deportation to death camps. Thus, relatively few Germans were needed for such "Aktions or official actions by the German government against the Jewish people. Nor did their success involve any type of cooperation from Polish gentiles. Because the system set up by the Germans did not rely on Polish police, even the opportunity for the Polish police to aid the German roundup of the Jews was marginal or non-existent, as pointed out by Raul Hilberg, the foremost Holocaust historian, in his important work, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: Aaron Asher/Harper Collins, 1992). Conditions in the Brańsk ghetto have been described in Isaiah Trunk's *Judenrat: The Jewish Councils in Eastern Europe Under Nazi Occupation* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), pp. 380, 502; in *Briansk: Book of Memories* (New York: Shoulson Press, 1948); and in a recent study by Zbigniew Romaniuk, titled "Brańsk i okolice w latach 1939-1953: reminiscencje zdarzeń", in *Ziemia Brańska*, volume 6 (1995), pp. 3-32. Brańsk also had its corrupt Judenrat and ghetto police, and the liquidation of the ghetto was carried out by German SS divisions and non-Polish auxiliaries (Ukrainians and Lithuanians). A death penalty was imposed on any Pole who dared to assist a Jew (though many did in fact do so notwithstanding.)

Polish gentiles certainly were not the masterminds who formed the ghettos or collaborated with the Germans in the brutal treatment of the Jews. To the contrary, Polish gentiles sabotaged German plans for the starvation of ghetto inmates. The Polish gentiles made illegal deliveries of food to the ghettos - including about 25 tons of flour per day in Warsaw alone. Many Poles were shot by the Germans for making such deliveries. When the daily food ration in Warsaw fell to 184 calories for a Jew, 669 for a Polish gentile, and 2,613 for a German, 80 percent of the food consumed in the ghetto was smuggled in by Polish gentiles. The supply of raw materials into the ghetto was forty times greater than that officially permitted by the Germans, according to the records of the Jewish Council of the Warsaw Ghetto. (Pogonowski, *Jews in Poland*, pp. 106-107.)

After Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler verbally ordered the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question," namely the extermination of eleven million European Jews. To work out and communicate the details of implementing the "Final Solution," the Wannsee Conference was held in Berlin on January 20, 1942. At the conference, the leaders of

the German civil service established the specific means by which the genocide was to be conducted. As a direct result of the conference, the German government announced an invitation for bids from German industry to purchase equipment for an industrial process to exterminate eleven million European Jews. According to plans developed at the conference, terrorized Jewish personnel were to be used in the extermination process. Also, the plans further directed that the extermination camps were to be isolated from the Polish population for maximum secrecy. For this reason, the camp guards were recruited from Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine. Despite German terror and German attempts to keep Poles in the dark about the Germans' actions, radio broadcasts made by the Polish resistance regularly informed the West of German atrocities in Poland. (Pogonowski, *Jews in Poland*, pp. 110, 119, 120, 121, 124, 125).

Massive deportations from the Warsaw ghetto in the summer of 1942 (to the Treblinka death camp) were not carried out with the assistance of any Polish agency. Indeed, in German-occupied Poland, there was not even a vestige of a Polish government at that time. Instead, the deportations were organized by the Jewish police in coordination with the Judenrat and the occupying German forces. Horrifying descriptions of this Aktion are found in the diaries of Emanuel Ringelblum, the chronicler of the Warsaw ghetto, and elsewhere. These sad events are only a part, but a significant part, of the eventual roundup and execution by the Germans of a large proportion of Poland's Jews in what later came to be referred to as the Holocaust.

On April 19, 1943, a Jewish uprising began in the Warsaw Ghetto as Germans started the final liquidation of the Jews there. The massacre ended on May 8, 1943. Professor Marian Fuks later wrote: "It is absolutely certain fact that without help and even active participation of the Polish resistance movement it would have not been possible at all to bring about the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto." (*Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce/Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland*, January-March 1989, p. 44.) Marek Edelman, the last surviving leader of the revolt, shares this view: "We didn't get adequate help from the Poles, but without their help we couldn't have started the uprising.... You have to remember that the Poles themselves were short of arms. The guilty party is Nazism, fascism - not the Poles." (*The Canadian Jewish News*, November 9, 1989.)

It should go without saying that the German occupation and brutal control of Poland was not welcomed by the Polish people. Unfortunately, neither could the Polish people find solace in the eventual Soviet re-entry into Poland and their consequent program of brutal control. Upon Soviet re-entry into Poland in 1944, the Soviet terror apparatus was systematically liquidating the remnants of the Polish Home Army and any perceived Polish opponents of a Soviet takeover and control of Poland. It is an undeniable fact that many Jews, usually communist functionaries, were collaborating with the Soviets in denouncing, jailing, and executing Poles. (See for example, Wanda Lisowska's 1946 account on conditions in Ejszyski, another town in Eastern Poland featured in Shtetl, found in *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 36 (1976), and reproduced at page 29 of this book.) Poles suspected of having either collaborated with the Germans or of being anti-Semitic could be, and were, executed with impunity. For example, in Drohiczyn, not far from Brańsk, nine Polish gentiles were murdered by local Jews because they were falsely suspected of killing a Jew, a crime in fact perpetrated by the Soviets [*Archiwum Polski Podziemnej: Dokumenty i materiały, 1939-1956* (Warszawa, April 1994), volume 2, p. 80.]

Tens of thousands of Polish gentiles were executed in repressions that affected the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent Polish gentiles. The foregoing are not invented facts: both Simon Wiesenthal (see below) and Stanisław Krajewski, vice

chairperson of the Polish Council of Christians and Jews, among others, have publicly admitted their shame on this account. Under these types of wartime circumstances, where Jews were successfully encouraged to betray Polish gentiles to the Soviet authorities, animosities toward Jews in the general population were not a matter of anti-Semitism, but simply a matter of survival. Active Jewish collaboration and popular support for Soviet forces invading Poland occurred from the beginning of the War. In the book *Poles, Jews, Socialists: The Failure of an Ideal*, edited by Antony Polonsky et al. (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1996) - Polin: *Studies in Polish Jewry*, volume 9, Dov Levin writes: "The Red Army entered Vilna [Wilno, Poland] early on the morning of Tuesday, 19 September 1939, to an enthusiastic welcome by Vilna's Jewish residents, in sharp contrast to the Polish population's reserve and even hostility. Particular ardor was displayed by leftist groups and their youthful members, who converged on the Red Army tank columns bearing sincere greetings and flowers."

Despite these enormous obstacles, and the fact that Polish gentiles also were undergoing their own Holocaust which consumed several million victims, hundreds of thousands of Polish Christians risked their lives to help Jews. In Warsaw alone, before the uprising of 1944 which resulted in its total destruction, some 15,000 Jews were being sheltered. Emanuel Ringelblum estimated that as many as 60,000 out of the city's 900,000 Christian residents were involved in the rescue efforts. Assistance has been documented at more than 600 Catholic churches, monasteries, convents, and church-run orphanages throughout Poland. Poles form the largest group recognized by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Gentiles," as many as 40 percent of all those recognized. Yad Vashem is an official Israeli institution devoted to honoring those who saved Jews from the Holocaust.

Just as there were some Jewish collaborators during World War II, small numbers of Polish gentiles also collaborated with the Germans. There is no justification or excuse for their actions, and neither was this conduct condoned or tolerated. With the active support of Polish public opinion, the Polish Underground passed and carried out many death sentences against anyone found collaborating with the Germans. It is regrettably true that collaborators, whether with the Nazis or the Soviets, whether Polish Christians or Jews, were an effective force to contend with. But at the same time, they were tiny, marginal and unrepresentative groups in their respective communities.

Simon Wiesenthal has advocated the following wise and balanced assessment of that tragic period which consumed millions of Jewish and Polish lives: "Then the war came. It is at times like these that the lower elements in society surface - the blackmailers who would betray Jews... On the other hand, the 30,000 or 40,000 Jews who survived survived thanks to the help of the Poles. This I know." During the five years of German occupation many of the efforts to shelter Jews ended tragically for the Jewish victims and their Christian friends. Most instances of sporadic assistance are seldom remembered and taken into account.

What do the leading Holocaust historians have to say about alleged Polish complicity in the Holocaust? Yisrael Gutman, director of research at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem and editor in chief of *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* (1990), has stated authoritatively: "All accusations against the Poles that they were responsible for the 'Final Solution' are not even worth mentioning. Secondly, there is no validity at all in the contention that Polish attitudes were the reason for the sitting of the death camps in Poland." And again: "I want to be unequivocal about this. When it is said that Poles supposedly took part in the extermination of the Jews on the side of the Germans... that is not true! It has no foundation in fact. There was no such thing as Poles taking part in the

extermination of the Jewish population." Professor Gutman stated that the percentage of Poles who collaborated with the Germans was "infinitesimally small." Richard Pipes, of Harvard University, wrote in the introduction to Pogonowski's book, *Jews in Poland*, published on the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising: "It must never be mistakenly believed that the Holocaust was perpetrated by the Poles. Nor must it be ignored that three million Poles perished at German hands." Szymon Datner, longtime director of Warsaw's Jewish Historical Institute, has been equally blunt: "Poles are not responsible for the crimes of the Holocaust."

**Events Following World War II**

Only Soviet-trained intelligence agents were trusted by the Soviet government among Polish prewar Communists. Among those "the Jews... were... considered less susceptible to the lures of Polish nationalism, to which even impeccable Polish communists were not thought immune." (Chęciński, op. cit., p. 71.) During 1945, the Soviets recruited to the Office of State Security a very large number of Jews. Mostly Jews, including Holocaust survivors, were assigned to carry out the Soviet policy of de-Nazification in the former German territories which Poland was to annex on the basis of the Potsdam Agreement in compensation for her Eastern Provinces lost to the Soviet Union in 1939.

After the War, over 1,200 former Nazi camps were used to hold German nationals, 99 percent of whom were noncombatants. Under the guise of de-Nazification, members of the pro-Western Polish resistance and their families were processed together with the Germans. In a brief period of time between 60,000 and 80,000 people died in the de-Nazification camps. Starvation diets, typhoid fever, and mistreatment caused the high death rate. Torture was commonplace. Jewish officers of the UB (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa - Office of State Security), including those who themselves survived unimaginable suffering at German hands, were now used by the Soviets to inflict the same on others. Again, to quote Simon Wiesenthal, "I always say that I know what kind of role Jewish communists played in Poland after the war. And just as I, as a Jew, do not want to shoulder responsibility for the Jewish communists, I cannot blame 36 million Poles for those thousands of blackmailers."

Polish gentiles bore the brunt of the killing force unleashed by the Soviets while they established their totalitarian hold on Poland and the Polish people. Chęciński cites a study based on party and security archives that estimate 80,000 to 200,000 Polish gentiles were killed by the Soviets during their takeover, while approximately 1,600 Jews were killed at the same time. (Chęciński, op. cit., p. 64.)

John Sack, a former CBS News bureau chief in Spain and a journalist for 48 years, spent seven years doing research and conducting interviews in Poland, Germany, Israel, and the United States to document the story of Jewish actions taken directly after the end of World War II in response to the wartime atrocities. On November 21, 1993, the CBS program *60 Minutes* presented an interview with Mr. Sack and footage of interviews with the survivors who testified to torture and killings in those camps. A Polish woman, Dr. Dorota Boreczek, former inmate of the Świętochłowice camp, testified that she was arrested (at age 14) and tortured together with her mother. Her father, a member of the Polish Home Army, was executed. [See John Sack, *An Eye For An Eye* (New York: Basic Books/Harper Collins, 1993), pp. 163-165.]

**To be continued**  
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